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PUBLISHED EVERY
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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

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Vol. LXXVI.

Buffalo Bill's Relentless Trail;

OR,

The Unknown Slayer of the Black Cavalry.

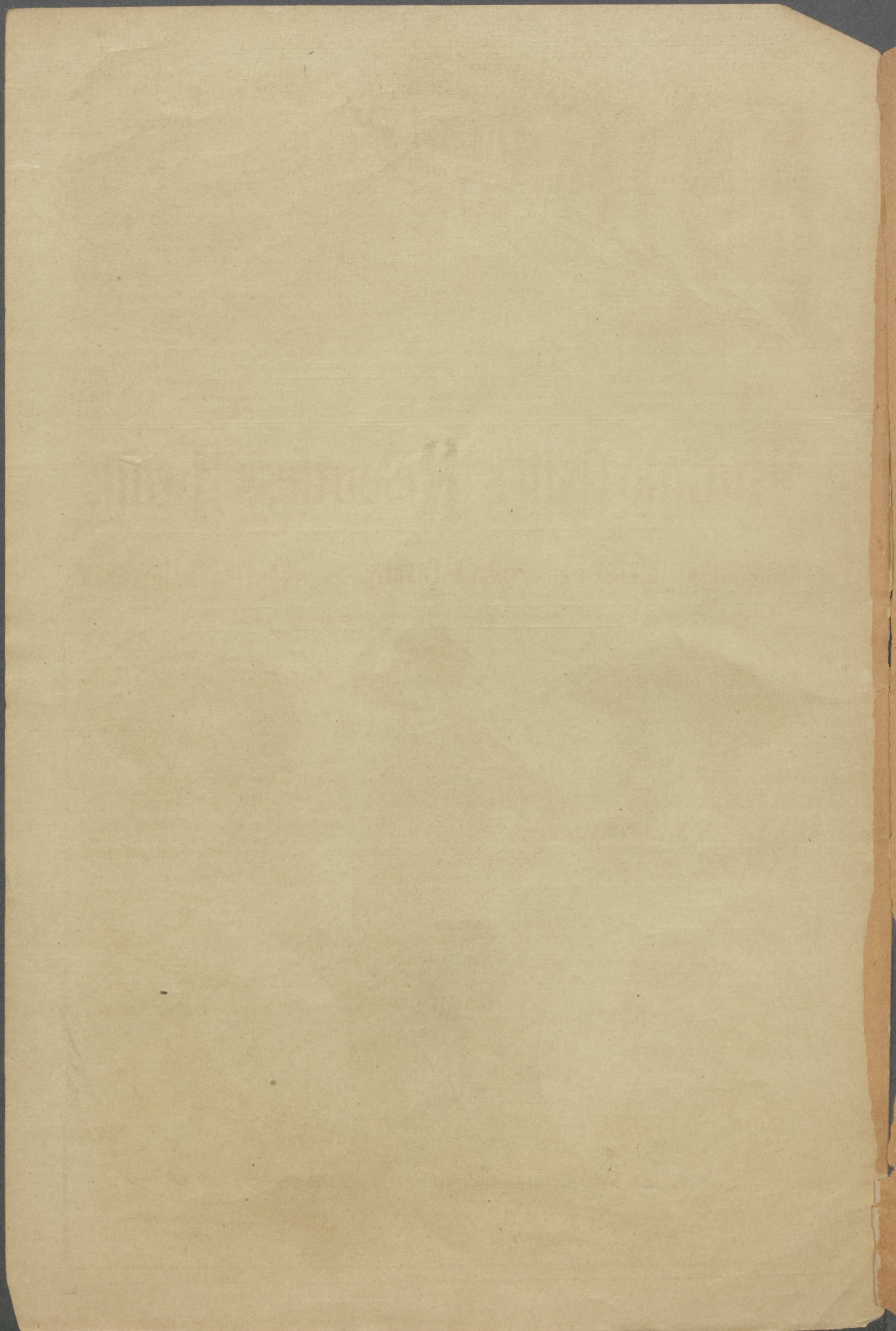
By Col. P. Ingraham.



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DR. FRANK POWELL.

MAN KILLER.



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THE UNKNOWN SLAYER OF THE BLACK CAVALRY.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "BUFFALO BILL" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNKNOWN NEMESIS.

"The Black Troops are doomed!"

"A vow of vengeance seems to have been registered against them by parties unknown, and whose deeds are most mysterious, so mysterious, in fact, that I am at a loss to know what to do."

The speaker was Colonel Alfred Thorp of Fort Benham, in the then almost unknown Territory of Arizona.

He was seated in his stone cabin quarters of the fort, which was situated in a beautiful valley through which ran a small stream, a Godsend in that wild land.

Under his command were over five hundred soldiers, and yet all lived with their lives in their hands, so to speak, for about them, in the mountain fastnesses, were merciless red foes, the Moqui Indians ready to take advantage of the first careless act of the garrison to swoop down and sweep their paleface conquerors from the earth.

A splendid type of the frontier soldier, Colonel Thorp's face yet wore an anxious look, as he uttered the words that open this story.

An enemy in the open he could fight, but one who struck in the dark and in the back, one who played the part of an assassin, he did not know how to meet.

And such a foe had been making life miserable at Fort Benham for half a year.

Such a foe had crept up in the night, and would send a bullet, an arrow, or drive a knife into the heart of the sentinel, causing no alarm, until the failure of the guard to utter the call:

"Post Number — Ten o'clock and all's well!"

The silence told that the sentinel on Post Number — was dead, that all was not well.

And so it was shown when the guard on its round found

"The sentinel off duty forever."

Such had been the tragedies at Fort Benham, and with such boldness that a sentry had been shot by an arrow even in the broad glare of day upon an exposed post of duty.

Again, when guarding cattle feeding in the valley, when hunting stray horses, a man had fallen under the fire of this hidden and unknown foe.

What it meant no one could tell, for it seemed to be to seek a peculiar revenge, for, strangest of all, only the Black Troops were the sufferers.

At Fort Benham there were three companies of colored infantry, a troop of cavalry, and a battery of light artillery, also manned by blacks—in all over three hundred men.

The two troops of white cavalry, the battery of light artillery, and a company of infantry that made up the garrison had never lost a man through this unknown assassin.

It was a blow against the Black Troops alone.

That was what made it the more mysterious.

If Indians were the secret slayers, why were not the white sentinels killed?

Surely the palefaces were the mortal foes of the redskin, worse by far than the black faces.

And this fact had begun to make itself felt among the colored troops.

They had begun to feel that a secret foe had doomed them to death.

Over and over their past deeds they went, as soldiers, to see who they had so injured that death alone could wipe out their deed.

If the redskins dealt these deathblows, it did not so always appear, for the arrow had not alone been used, but shared its deadly work with the rifle, revolver, and bowie knife of the white man, and even the fatal coil of the lasso had claimed its victims.

This would indicate that the mind, perhaps the hand, of the paleface, struck at the life of the Black Troops.

Not once had this secret foe been seen. Not once had he left a trail.

Not once had a sentinel been left alive to tell the strange story of the tragedy. The deadly work was completed ere the foe left his victim.

He meant not that there should be any dying confessions—he made no mistakes.

There had been a suspicion upon the garrison, that the unknown slayer must surely dwell within the walls of Fort Benham.

If so, who was he?

There was not one in the fort upon whom suspicion could justly fall.

So it was that when six months had gone by, and over a score of black soldiers had fallen on their posts, that Colonel Alfred Thorp said to one of his officers, a man with a record, as will be shown:

"The Black Troops are doomed!"

CHAPTER II.

A MAN WITH A RECORD.

There was but one officer in the quarters of Colonel Thorp, and to him he addressed himself, as he had in the opening chapter.

This officer wore the fatigue uniform of a surgeon of cavalry, and was a most striking-looking person, in form, face, and bearing.

His face was one that was attractive, for its features were well molded, his eyes were dark and expressive, at the same time very penetrating, and about the mouth there was a look of daring and determination that was pronounced in the extreme.

Like the lamented General Custer, and several other officers of the army who had seen much frontier service, the surgeon wore his dark hair long, and a fine mustache shaded his mouth.

His form was that of an athlete, and his movements were quick and decided, while his voice was strangely low and musical in tone.

The surgeon was a man with a record, and he was regarded as being as fine a scout and Indian fighter as he was an adept in surgery and medicine.

On the border he was known as the Surgeon Scout, to the Indians as White Beaver, the Great Medicine Chief, and to his few intimates as Frank Powell and "Doc."

The boon comrade of Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and Texas Jack, Doctor Frank Powell had few equals in border craft and Indian trailing, and as a man possessing nerve and ability, while that he was a dead shot and wild rider and skilled lasso thrower all knew.

Lately ordered to Fort Benham, Surgeon Powell found many there who knew of his career, and Colonel Thorp had met him in the northwest, and was well aware of his cleverness as a scout, as well as his being one to do and dare anything.

When the Black Troops, therefore, began to be the victims of an unknown and mysterious foe, or foes, and the scouts of the fort could find no solution to the tragic mystery, Colonel Thorp had decided to seek the advice of Doctor Frank Powell, the "Man with a Record," as some spoke of him.

Having made the surgeon acquainted fully with the situation, Colonel Thorp, after expressing himself as he had about the Black Troops being doomed, continued:

"Now, I sent for you, Surgeon Powell, well knowing what your advice is worth as an officer and scout, and I wish to consult with you."

"I feel honored, Colonel Thorp, and will do all in my power to aid you, for

I have myself wondered at this strange killing of the colored troops."

"I have not found an officer, scout, or soldier who could account for it, and the colored troops do not understand any reason for their having been picked out to die, while white sentinels, when on duty, escape."

"It must be fathomed, sir, that is all," was the Surgeon Scout's stern reply.

"Ah! that is just it! It must be fathomed, yet how?"

"That we must decide upon, sir."

"That is just what I wish you to do, Powell."

"Have you thought of no plan, sir?"

"A hundred, but without results."

"I have two assistant surgeons, sir, here at the fort."

"Yes."

"There is no sickness to speak of among the troops, and only a few wounded in hospital."

"Yes, the secret foe of the Black Troops never wounds; he kills."

"Yes, sir."

"But if you can give me leave, and my own way of going about this finding of the slayer of these men, I will be willing to undertake the work, sir."

"You shall have your own way, go about it as you please, call for what help you need, and in all else I can help you I will."

"I thank you, sir, and let me say that I can make a good start, for it so happens that an old frontier pard of mine is now on the way to Fort Benham to visit me, he having been given a leave of absence for some little time, and there is no other man that can accomplish what he does, while, more, he may not come alone, but bring with him a comrade scarcely less famous than he is, and their duty is to carry out in this country certain work they have in view."

"Do I know them, Surgeon Powell?"

"Yes, sir, by reputation at least, for I refer to Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill."

Colonel Thorp sprang to his feet with almost excitement in look and manner, while he cried:

"Are those two men coming here?"

"Yes, sir, at least one of them I am sure of, the other will come if he can get off."

"Then, with Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill to aid you, I need say no more, Surgeon Powell, but place the whole matter in your hands, for it will be done, these murders will end, and the guilty will be brought to punishment."

"Yes, Powell, three men with the records that you, Buffalo Bill, and Wild Bill have can almost accomplish impossibilities."

"For them, sir, and myself, I thank you for your complimentary words; but there are two more men I will ask the services of."

"Granted, before I know who they are," was the colonel's prompt reply.

CHAPTER III.

THE SECRET TO BE SOLVED.

"If I fail, Colonel Thorp, I certainly cannot complain that you did not give me every aid," said Surgeon Powell, in answer to the colonel's prompt offer, when he asked for two more men in the fort.

"Who are the men, Powell. You have but to name them."

"You have here, sir, an old trapper known as Silent Sam?"

"Yes, a man of sixty, if not more, yet as agile, strong, and quick as a youth. He is an odd character, spends his time in trapping, and it is said has put by a good sum of money. But he knows this country perfectly, has warned me time and again when the Indians are getting ready to strike a blow, and yet how he escapes death at their hands is a mystery to all in the fort."

"He is the man I wish, one of the two, Colonel Thorp."

"He is here in the fort now, but you know is not under my command, but I will see him and try to get him to go with you."

"He will go, sir."

"I am not so sure of that, Surgeon Powell, for he is devoted to trapping and is preparing to start upon another trail now. The man well deserves his name of Silent Sam, for he never speaks unless spoken to, or he has to do so, though he is not sullen or of an ugly disposition. Why, he never uttered a dozen words in telling me the Indians were preparing for a raid some months ago."

"It is his way, sir. But tell him that I wish him to go with me, and he will not refuse."

"All right, sir, I'll send for him tonight."

"But who is the other man?"

"The Indian who is known as Man Killer."

"Ah! There is another silent man, and a strange character. He came to the fort a year ago, and while he wears the war bonnet of a Ute, he has the trappings of a Moqui, the weapons of a Sioux and the superb blanket of a Navajo. Then, too, he speaks the tongue of each tribe named perfectly, and his English has very little accent. Which is his tribe no one knows, and it seems his intention not to allow me to find out; but he is heart and soul the friend of the palefaces, and, though we know nothing about him here, we trust him thoroughly, and his services have been invaluable."

"Well, colonel, I wish Silent Sam and Man Killer from the fort and I will surely have as allies Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill."

"Certainly the strongest team you could have."

"Yes, sir, it will be a hand full of trumps. But it must not be known that I go on this duty, and with these men."

"I understand, Powell."

"Those in the fort must think I have been granted leave, and will go to visit comrades at the nearest post."

"Yes."

"The old trapper, Silent Sam, must start as though on a trapping trail, and Man Killer, the Indian chief, must be sent off on a scout."

"Yes."

"I will appoint a rendezvous where we are to meet, and then we can head off Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, and my little band will be complete, while a pack horse I take along will carry all the supplies we need."

"I do not just see, Powell, why you take your men from the fort, to discover the perpetrators of crimes committed here."

"The assassins, sir, are either in the fort or out of it."

"Yes."

"If here, we can discover it by watching until the next sentinel is murdered."

"Yes."

"If the assassin is not in the fort, then we can find out where he comes from."

"You are right."

"Go ahead in your own way, Surgeon Powell; but tell me, do you think it possible that a man, or men, in the fort can be the slayer of these negro sentinels?"

"It is possible, sir, but not probable."

"Now, my theory is that Indians are the murderers, for it is nothing more than murder, the manner in which these poor sentinels have been killed."

"If Indians, sir, we will discover the fact."

"You do not say what you think, however."

"I have not yet made up my mind, sir."

"Well, I have no right to expect you to express an opinion, especially as you have undertaken to fathom the mystery for me, and thus prevent the utter demoralization of the colored troops."

"Colonel Thorp," said Surgeon Powell, seriously, "I regard this killing of the negro troops not as the work of redskins, for paleface and black face would both fall their victims. Who is guilty has to be found out; but it will be discovered to be the work of envy, malice, or revenge, more than likely the latter. The cause of this revenge we do not know any more than we do the avenger,

but the secret will be revealed in some way, murder will out, and I undertake the task of solving the mystery, and bringing the guilty to punishment as a stern duty, and with a determination to be successful."

"Now, sir, I will go and arrange for my departure and the work in hand," and Surgeon Powell left Colonel Thorp much food for thought.

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGE PARDS.

To his pleasant quarters went Surgeon Frank Powell, and, after pacing up and down the room for some time, as though forming his plans of action, he called his servant and sent him away on an errand.

In half an hour the man returned with the word:

"Both the Indian and Silent Sam are at headquarters, sir, for the colonel sent for them, but I left word with the orderly to tell them to come to you, sir, when they left there."

"That was right," and Surgeon Powell continued to pace the floor.

It was not long before, without a sound to denote his coming, the tall form of an Indian glided into the room.

"Medicine Chief White Beaver want to see Man Killer?" he asserted, rather than asked, as he confronted Doctor Powell.

"Yes, I sent for the Man Killer. Sit down and smoke your pipe with me," and the surgeon filled a handsome pipe he took from where it hung on the wall, and, handing it to the Indian, said:

"I'll give this to the Man Killer."

The eyes of the redskin fairly danced with delight, but he only said:

"White Beaver good man. Man Killer his red brother."

Lighting his own pipe, the surgeon took a seat, and the two smoked away in silence for some time, the eyes of the white man now and then resting upon the face of the Indian with a searching regard.

It was a strong face, every feature strongly stamped with character.

It was not a cruel face, but one of power, marked with intelligence and determined will.

The hair was long, straight, black as ink, and combed back, falling below the massive shoulders, and his only head ornament were half a dozen eagle feathers.

He wore a buckskin hunting shirt, leggings, moccasins, and a belt with a bowie knife and a pair of revolvers, while, when on the trail, he had slung at his back a repeating rifle.

Around his neck was a massive necklace of bones from human fingers, and of grizzly claws, each showing his prowess as a brave chief.

After puffing away in silence for some time, the chief, for his feathers denoted that he was one, held out his pipe to be refilled.

This the surgeon did, and then remarked:

"The big chief sent for the Man Killer?"

"Yes."

"He told him that he wanted him to go with White Beaver upon a trail?"

"Yes."

"The Man Killer will go?"

"Yes, go on any trail with the White Beaver."

"I will leave to-morrow night."

"Man Killer ready."

"All right, do not speak of going."

"Man Killer have silent tongue."

"I know that well. The white trapper, Silent Sam, will go with us."

"Heap good man for trail."

"Yes, and we will meet one, perhaps two, good men on the trail."

The Indian nodded. He did not ask who they were to meet or where they were going.

"Did the big white chief tell the Man Killer where we were going?"

"No."

"Big white chief tell Man Killer go

with Medicine Chief. Say, White Beaver tell him all."

"I will. We go to find out who it is that kills the negro soldiers so mysteriously in this fort," and Surgeon Powell looked fixedly at the redskin.

The latter's face did not show an emotion, as he silently smoked on.

"Does the Man Killer think we can find out?"

"White Beaver great chief—maybe so, bime-by, he find out killer of black braves."

"I hope so. The Man Killer has a good horse?"

"Heap good."

"I will take all that we need for camping."

"Killer of black braves not here?" asked the Indian.

"I do not know. That we must find out, and by going away from the fort we can do so, I hope."

"Maybe so, bime-by," was the laconic response, and the Indian, carefully wrapping up his pipe in buckskin, strode out of the doctor's quarters.

"That redskin is as deep a mystery to me as is this slayer of the negro soldiers. I have half suspected him of being this secret slayer, and yet there is no reason really for such belief that I can fasten upon. Still, I will have him with me, and that will settle that question," and Surgeon Powell turned toward another person who had just entered his quarters as silently as had the Man Killer, and wholly neglectful of the little formality of knocking.

The newcomer was as striking looking a personage in his way as was the Indian.

It was Silent Sam, the Lone Trapper, and a rugged specimen of manhood he was, for he was of massive build, without a pound of useless flesh upon him, was dressed in Indian-tanned buckskin, moccasins, blue woolen shirt, and a wolf-skin cap.

His hair, worn long, and beard were as white as snow, and he wore a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, the glasses being smoked, as though he suffered with weak eyes, though he had never been known to miss anything he drew a bead on with rifle or revolver.

A kindly, yet determined, intelligent face, make up the picture of a somewhat remarkable man.

CHAPTER V.

SILENT SAM.

"I'm here."

This was the greeting of the old borderman, as he came into the quarters of Surgeon Powell.

"I am glad to see you, Silent Sam, for I wish to have a talk with you. Sit down."

The trapper did so, uttering no word.

"Will you smoke?"

"No."

"Have a drink?"

"No."

"You have seen Colonel Thorp?"

"Yes."

"I suppose he told you what he wanted?"

"No. Said you would."

"All right. I wish you to go on a trail with me."

"Colonel said that much."

"Will you go?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Now."

"I go to-morrow night."

"I'll be ready."

"I'll get all needed for the outfit."

"All right."

"Do you not wish to know where we are going?"

"That's your business."

"You are willing to trust me?"

"Every time."

"I thank you, Silent Sam."

"I know you, White Beaver Powell."

"And, knowing you as I do, I wish you along, for we are going upon a strange trail, and one that may be dangerous in the extreme."

Silent Sam made no reply.

He hardly appeared to be interested.

"I wish to ask you something, Sam?"

"All right."

"Have you ever thought of the mysterious killing of the black soldiers when on duty at this fort?"

"Yes."

"What is your opinion?"

"Revenge."

"That is my idea. But who is the avenger?"

"Nobody knows."

"Is he paleface, redskin, or negro?"

"Never thought which."

"Well, it is to try and find out that I am starting on this trail, and there is no need to tell you not to speak of why we go?"

"I don't talk."

The Surgeon Scout was convinced of that fact most thoroughly.

"I wish your valuable services, and I will take along the Indian chief, Man Killer."

"Just the man."

"Then we will be met on the trail by one or two others."

For the first time the silent man showed some curiosity, for he asked:

"Who?"

"Did you ever hear of Buffalo Bill?"

The man of few words smiled.

"Everybody has," he said, after a pause.

"Well, he is my friend, and is coming to see me. We will meet him on the trail."

"We'll find out what we want to know then," and Silent Sam seemed to feel tired at having uttered such a long sentence, for he sighed.

"You know of Wild Bill, also?"

"He's another of Buffalo Bill's kind."

"Yes, and I hope will come with Buffalo Bill."

"Good!"

"With those two men, you, the Indian, and myself, our little band will be made up."

"All good men—none better," and Silent Sam did not appear to be complimenting himself in the least.

He knew what he could do, and he was well aware that Surgeon Powell and the others he had selected were the very kings of bordermen.

"I wish to say, Silent Sam, that, although this mysterious killing has been done at and about the fort, I am going away from here to find out who the killer is."

"Right."

"We can certainly thus learn if Indians are doing the deadly work."

"Yes, can trail 'em."

"We can also find out if the murderer is one of the bands of outlaws which we know infest the country."

"Can track them, too."

"When this discovery is made, as to whether Indians or outlaws do the killing, we can then look nearer home."

"Yes."

"Well, now you know my plans, and we are to start to-morrow night, leaving the fort secretly, so as not to attract attention, and let it be known that we are gone. Should Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill come by a different trail than the one I expect them to take, Colonel Thorp will at once send them to a rendezvous where I will appoint to meet them, and—but what is that alarm?" and Surgeon Powell sprang to his feet and went to the door, Silent Sam following him.

There was evidently some cause of excitement in the fort, for soldiers were hastening to and fro, lights were moving, and voices were heard.

"I know," said Silent Sam.

"Yes, I think I do, too."

"Another black soldier killed."

"Beyond a doubt. I will go to the guardhouse and find out."

And, while Silent Sam glided away like a spectre, Surgeon Powell walked rapidly toward the guardhouse.

On his way he met the Indian Chief, Man Killer, who said, in his laconic way:

"One more black brave die."

CHAPTER VI.

THE AVENGER AT WORK.

Surgeon Powell, upon reaching the guardhouse, found that the Indian, whom he had supposed was following him, had disappeared.

He had quietly dropped out of sight.

The officer of the day was there, and he told Surgeon Powell that the relief, on its rounds half an hour before, had found the sentinel on Post Number Thirteen dead, an Indian arrow in his heart.

Of course, as there had been no report of a rifle or revolver, there had been no alarm, but the sentinel had without doubt been killed only a short while before, for the body was still warm.

"What does this mean, Powell?" asked the officer of the day, in a depreciating manner.

"It was a negro soldier, captain?"

"Oh, yes."

"None of the white soldiers seem to come under this ban of death."

"I suppose the colored troops are feeling very blue over it?"

"Those I have seen are, and I wish you would go to their quarters and try and pacify them, for they have much confidence in you."

"I will."

"Of course, the affair has been reported to the colonel?"

"At once."

"I will drop in at headquarters, and then go to the barracks of the Black Troops. But what is being done?"

"What can we do? The murderer has of course gone, his trail cannot be found by night, even if it can by day, and which I doubt, so all we can do is to keep the guard upon its rounds often, to give the sentinels confidence. If you can suggest anything else to the colonel, please do so."

Surgeon Powell walked away, rapidly toward headquarters.

The orderly told him the colonel was in his office, and he walked right in unannounced.

Colonel Thorp was pacing the floor, his face wearing a troubled look.

"Ah, Powell, I just sent for you."

"I did not meet your messenger, sir, but concluded to come and see you."

"You have heard of this last tragedy?"

"I just came from the guardhouse, sir."

"Well, what do you think?"

"That this secret slayer is a daring one, and is determined to carry out his work of revenge."

"Yes, and instead of leaving the fort, I think you had better begin your detective work right here."

"On the contrary, Colonel Thorp, I am the more convinced that I had better go."

"Why so?"

"I will then be able to learn more about the identity of this secret assassin."

"Well, have your own way, for I feel that you know best."

"I have seen both the Indian and the trapper, sir."

"Yes, I sent them to you, for I had a talk with each of them, and offered them liberal pay for their services."

"We have arranged to start to-morrow night, sir, and I am most anxious to get out of the fort without my going being known, so will ask to leave by the officers' gate, which is kept closed, and where no guard is on duty."

"Certainly. I will give you the key; but I wish you would go over to the barracks of the colored troops and quiet the poor fellows, for they are doubtless greatly worked up over this last deadly blow at one of their comrades."

"I intended to go, sir, and will at once do so. To-morrow I will call on you, sir, and go over our plans," and Surgeon Powell was turning to go, when he said:

"May I suggest, sir, that you let me send out half a dozen scouts, to leave the fort by scaling the wall, so that their going is not known, and that they be con-

stantly all on the move from post to post, only not to allow the sentinels to see them, and thus prevent another murder to-night?"

"It shall be done, and I will ask you to go to the scouts' camp and pick your men, sending them to their respective places of duty; but surely you do not expect another murder to-night?"

"I have a dread that there may be, sir, and I will go at once to the scouts' camp, then to the barracks of the Black Troops, and try and pacify them—ah! there is another cause of alarm!"

It was the sergeant of the guard, and he came in, with white face, hastily saluted, and said, excitedly:

"The captain sent me to tell you, sir, that another colored soldier has just been killed on his post."

"By Heaven! but this is terrible!" cried Colonel Thorp, with anger and indignation commingled in look and tone.

"On what post was it, sergeant?" asked Surgeon Powell, calmly.

"Number One, sir."

"Ah! right at my quarters, almost."

"You are sure it was a negro soldier, sergeant?"

"Yes, colonel, for the colored troops are only on guard to-night, sir."

"All right; return to Captain Banks and tell him to put a white soldier on each post with the man now on duty, and thus keep them through the night."

"Yes, sir, the darkies will be glad of this, sir," said the sergeant, as he hastened away.

"And you will go at once to the scouts, Powell?"

"I will, sir, and then to the negro barracks, for I wish to know how this last man was killed, though it must have been with an arrow, as we heard no shot."

With this Surgeon Powell hastened away, and in less than ten minutes half a dozen of the best scouts were slipping out of the fort, to take the beats assigned them, beyond the line of sentinels.

Going then to the barracks of the Black Troops, Surgeon Powell met on the way the Indian chief, Man Killer, who joined him and said:

"One more black brave die—make two."

"Yes, but come with me, Man Killer, to the quarters of the black braves."

Without a word the Indian obeyed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FATAL ARROWS.

The colored troops were in a terrible state of excitement, their white officers in vain trying to quiet them.

At the appearance of Surgeon Powell they all turned to him, for there was that about the man that commanded confidence.

There was a personal magnetism about him which every wounded and sick soldier had been quick to recognize.

In the assembly hall lay the two dead bodies of the soldiers that had fallen on their posts, doing their duty.

The hand of the unknown assassin had cut them off without a word or warning.

Both had been killed by an arrow.

One of the arrows had been removed, but the other was still sticking in the heart whose pulsations it had forever silenced.

The black soldiers greeted Surgeon Powell with salutes and cries of delight at his coming.

"Be calm, men! You are soldiers, and not men to be alarmed at death," he said, in his calm, kindly way.

At once there was a hush in the hall.

Walking straight to the two stretchers upon which lay the murdered black soldiers, Surgeon Powell bent over them.

His hand rested gently upon the head of the man first slain.

His body was barely cold, and from it the fatal arrow had been taken, and lay upon the broad breast of the black soldier.

The Surgeon Scout took up the arrow, looked carefully at it, amid a deathlike silence, and with every eye upon him.

By his side stood the Indian chief, Man Killer.

Having regarded the arrow searchingly, for a minute or more, and which seemed far longer to the lookers-on, Surgeon Powell handed it to the Indian.

"Let the Man Killer tell me who fired this arrow, paleface or redskin?"

The Man Killer took it and regarded it with deepest attention.

He looked at the point, the shape, the feathered end, and then said, calmly:

"Redskin make him—Navajo—paleface may shoot him—maybe so, maybe no."

All heard the Indian's response.

It told them nothing.

The arrow was made by a Navajo Indian, may have been shot by a white man.

Who could tell?

Taking the arrow back from the Indian, the Surgeon Scout walked around to the body of the other black soldier.

Like the other, he was a splendid specimen of manhood.

In his broad breast the arrow that had killed him still remained.

It was buried some six inches deep.

"Fired just as the other was, from directly in front of the man, and at a very short distance from him, as is shown by the depth it penetrated.

"The soldiers were pacing their beats, and while going from him the murderer slipped into position, and upon their return fired. I do not believe either saw their foe or knew what killed them."

Each word spoken by the Surgeon Scout was listened to with rapt attention.

The black troops seemed to feel that he could make no mistake.

What he said was set down as fact.

Taking hold of the arrow, then, Surgeon Powell, by a quick, strong jerk, drew it from the body, the act causing several dark faces to turn an ashen hue.

The arrow was then looked over even more critically than had been the other.

Apparently satisfied with his inspection of the fatal shaft, Surgeon Powell handed it to the Indian.

Letting him inspect it from point to feather, the surgeon placed his hand upon the pulse of the second victim of the unknown slayer of the black soldiers.

The body was not yet cold in death.

But death had come suddenly.

"What does the Man Killer know about that arrow?" and Surgeon Powell turned suddenly from the dead negro to the living Indian.

The Man Killer never moved, other than to raise his eyes, and after a moment replied:

"No Navajo make him."

"So I discovered. But the other arrow was made by a Navajo?"

"Yes."

"What tribe made this arrow?"

"Ute."

"The Man Killer is right; did a Ute fire this arrow to kill the black brave?"

"Maybe Ute, maybe Navajo, maybe paleface," was the reply.

The Surgeon Scout took the arrow, with the other one, and said to the white officer commanding the black infantry:

"I will keep these, Captain Wayland, for I have each one of the other fatal missiles used, bullets and all, and some day they may tell a story."

Then, addressing the black troops gathered about him, he bade them to accept the situation as brave soldiers should.

They had a secret foe, but the duty of soldiers was to face death in hidden form, and some day it would be their turn to avenge the fatal blows then given them.

Until that time came, they must accept what came to them, meet all danger as bravely as had their comrades who had died upon their posts of duty.

They must be men, and forget the superstitious teachings of their childhood, and await their time to strike back at their unknown enemy.

"Murder will out," continued Surgeon Powell. "There may be more of you to fall, but meet your fate as others have, without shrinking, and bide your time, for revenge is sweet, and one of these

days, I promise you, you will be avenged for all that you have been made to suffer."

And so the calm words of the Surgeon Scout stilled the excitement, and when he left the assembly hall the men were becoming silent and stern, in their determination to bide their time.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TRAIL.

The bodies of the two dead soldiers were buried with military honors the next day, and upon their comrades seemed to settle a cloud of gloom.

The day passed quietly, however, and only when the shadows of night began to creep over the scene did the men of the colored commands begin to grow uneasy.

Surgeon Powell had been closeted for a couple of hours with Colonel Thorp and his adjutant, and the result was that two men were put on each sentinel post, a white soldier and a black one, while several scouts were kept beyond the line circling around the fort.

But, in spite of this precaution, and treble force on the outer line, counting the scouts as well as the sentinels, before night had settled down an hour a sudden cry was heard, and the voice of the white sentinel on duty near headquarters rang out almost wildly, shouting:

"Corporal of the guard!

"Post Number Three—the black sentinel has been killed!"

Instantly the fort was a scene of excitement, and only stern military discipline prevented a panic.

At a double quick the guard went to Post Number Three, the officer of the day at its head, and there was found the negro sentinel, lying on his beat, an arrow through his neck.

He was not dead, and in vain tried to speak, to tell what he had seen, what he knew.

The white soldier at the same post was an Irishman, and he was considerably rattled.

He quickly told the officer of the day that he had been at the further end of his beat, when he heard a dull thud, a moan, and a fall.

He called to his companion, for he could not see him in the darkness, and got for answer a groan.

Then he ran to where he had left him a minute before, leaning against the stockade wall, and found him lying on the ground, writhing in agony.

Calling the guard, he had tried to get the dying negro soldier to tell him who had fired on him, but in vain.

He strove hard to speak, but could not.

And in vain did the dying man try to speak to the officer of the guard, for he could not.

Surgeon Powell came, accompanied by the Indian chief, Man Killer, and, kneeling by the negro, he drew the arrow from his neck, and tried to stanch the bleeding, to have him speak.

But all to no purpose, for the streaming blood choked all utterance, and the poor fellow soon passed away, and was borne to the barracks.

"Great God, Powell, what is to be done! for the negro troops are becoming panic-stricken?" cried Colonel Thorp, moved by the occasion out of his usual calm, when Surgeon Powell appeared and told him all.

"If that man could have spoken, sir, he would have solved this mystery, for he knew who his foe was and tried hard to tell."

Then, in answer to the colonel's question, Doctor Powell replied:

"As you ask me, sir, I would suggest that you take every black soldier off of sentinel duty at once, placing only the white men on, and withdrawing the scouts from the outside.

"Then you can be certain if this secret foe only strikes at the black troops, while, if he should kill a white soldier, the negroes would feel that they alone were not selected for death, and thus regain their nerve."

"You are right, and I thank you for the suggestion.

"I will at once give the order, before the black soldiers get into a panic.

"But when do you start upon your trail?"

"At once, sir. I was all ready when the alarm was given at Post Three, and had sent the Man Killer to you for any last instructions and to report my going."

"Yes, I had told him that there was nothing more to be said, and he had not been gone five minutes when I heard the alarm."

A few more words were said, and the Surgeon Scout left the colonel, grasping his hand warmly in parting and wishing him good luck.

Going to his quarters, he locked his cabin, after putting out the lamp, and then made his way to the officers' gate in a secluded part of the stockade.

There an officer awaited, and told him that Silent Sam and the Indian had passed out, and had taken his horse with them.

It was Colonel Thorp's handsome young aide de camp, Lieutenant Joe Chamberlin, as he was familiarly called by his brother officers, and he alone was in the secret of the going of the Surgeon Scout and his strange allies to solve the mystery that had proved so fatal to the negro soldiers.

"Good-by, Chamberlin, and let me say that I believe I am going to win this game against an unknown foe," said Surgeon Powell.

"I told Colonel Thorp you were the one to fathom this fatal mystery, and I feel that you will. I only wish that I was going with you, Powell."

"No, you carry out here the plans we discussed to-day, and you know where to bring a letter, or find us, if anything new turns up—

"Good-night," and the Surgeon Scout passed through the gate, Lieutenant Chamberlin closing and locking it behind him.

Several hundred yards away from the fort the Surgeon Scout came upon Silent Sam and the Man Killer awaiting him.

They were both well mounted, and had an extra horse belonging to Surgeon Powell, and which was used as a pack animal, being well loaded with a complete camping outfit.

"Now, pards, we are off on our work of trailing a mystery. Do your duty, and we will run this foe of the black soldiers to earth."

"We follow your lead, Surgeon Powell," said Silent Sam.

But the Indian chief, Man Killer, said nothing.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DEADLY DANGER.

During the day he was preparing for his trail, Surgeon Powell had sent a dozen of the best scouts of the fort to try and find some trail, track, or clue to the assassin who struck so boldly and at will.

The scouts returned before sunset, all of them, and each one had the same story to tell.

They could not find the slightest trace or clue to the murderer.

And yet that very night, with two men on duty at each post, one of them, the black soldier, had been killed.

If the secret assassin came from afar, the best scouts could not discover that fact.

Nor did they know whether it was an Indian or a paleface, that was the avenger.

With, therefore, little to guide him, other than what suspicions he might have in his own mind as to who the avenger might be, Surgeon Powell started upon his trail of mystery.

Through the darkness the three rode for ten miles or more, until Surgeon Powell turned into a clump of timber at the base of a cliff, where there was a spring and grass was abundant.

A fire was built, the horses staked out, and the blankets spread.

The night passed without disturbance, breakfast was gotten, the camp outfit packed up, and once more Surgeon Powell led the way.

He hoped to meet Buffalo Bill that day, and Wild Bill, if he accompanied him.

It was just before noon that they halted for rest and dinner, in the timber at the base of a wooded range, over which the trail ran.

Seeing some deer, Surgeon Powell left his pards to care for the horses and get dinner, while he went up the range to bring down a buck.

He had reached the summit without a shot, when his eyes fell upon some moving objects far out upon the plain, and coming along the trail that led over the range.

He had his field glass with him, and he made out two horsemen, leading a pack animal.

"Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, I'll take oath," he said, and just then, as he swept the plain with his glass, he saw something move behind a large rock at the side of the trail.

At first glance he believed it was a buffalo or elk lying there in the shade of the rock, but a moment more the glass had revealed two men crouching there, rifle in hand, and evidently lying in ambush for the coming horsemen.

"An ambush, as I live! Now to save my pards and catch those two fellows," muttered the Surgeon Scout.

He at once began to carefully take in the situation and note what was in his favor and against him.

His two pards in the camp were all of half a mile down the range.

The two men lying in wait were over half a mile from the base of the range upon the other side.

The two horsemen, supposed to be Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, were several miles away, riding slowly, and wholly unconscious of the danger lurking in their trail, for what else could the pair be hiding behind that rock, rifles in hand, than to kill those they saw coming?

For a moment Surgeon Powell was in a quandary, and glanced about him in an uncertain way.

As he did so he saw a canyon leading into the range, and not far from where he stood.

"Those fellows must have their camp in that canyon, and there may be others there. I must save my pards, but go slow in doing so, not to make any mistake."

A moment more of thought, and he bounded back down the trail toward his camp.

Half the distance was covered when he halloosed and hailed.

He was answered by Silent Sam.

"Leave all as it is there, mount your horses, and come here with all speed!"

The answer came:

"All right, sir!"

Then Surgeon Powell started up the trail again.

The men were still lying in ambush.

The two horsemen were slowly coming on toward their lurking foes.

Five minutes passed, and then the Man Killer and Silent Sam came, leading the horse of the surgeon.

"Man Killer, get down into that canyon and find out who and what is there."

"See those two men lying behind that rock?"

"Well, they are in ambush to kill those two horsemen — Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill."

"Silent Sam, I will go along the ridge on foot, you follow, out of sight, with the horses."

With this Surgeon Powell started on foot along the ridge, and just over the edge, so he could not be seen by the men in ambush, should they glance up that way.

Silent Sam, still further down, followed with the horses, while Man Killer went on foot to reach the canyon, which penetrated the range but a short distance.

The head of the canyon was flanked by the Surgeon Scout and Silent Sam, but the view down into it was obstructed by heavy timber.

Reaching a place almost opposite the rock where the men lay in ambush, and which was an eighth of a mile distant from the base of the range, Surgeon Powell saw that he could go down on foot, but the horses could not, so he must leave the animals and he and Silent Sam go to the rescue of the coming horsemen, and that must mean to capture or kill the would-be assassins.

That the horsemen were Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill Surgeon Powell now distinctly saw.

He could warn them by a shot of their danger, but that would also put the ambushers on their guard, and he wished to surprise them.

There was little time to be lost, for to capture the two men, he and Silent Sam must reach the base of the range and secure shelter, then warn the approaching horsemen by calling out and demanding the surrender of the pair of murderers, who must yield or fight it out, with Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill on one side of the rock and Surgeon Powell and Silent Sam on the other.

Calling to Silent Sam to leave the horses and follow him down the range, the Surgeon Scout was startled by a clear, loud hail, in a woman's voice, and suddenly, out of the mouth of the canyon the Man Killer had been sent to reconnoitre, dashed three horses, one carrying a rider.

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN IN BLACK.

The ringing hail had been in the clear, musical voice of a woman.

There was no doubting that fact.

It rang like a bugle note, and went echoing far over the plain.

It gave warning to the two men in ambush, for they sprang to their feet, rifle in hand, no longer seeking to remain hidden.

And out of the mouth of the canyon came three horses, bounding along like the wind.

Two were riderless, but were bridled and carried men's saddles.

They were led by the rider of the third horse.

That rider was a woman.

She was mounted upon a jet-black horse, and she rode with a reckless grace that showed that she was at home in the saddle.

Her riding habit was black, she wore a black sombrero, with broad brim and sable plume, and at first glance Surgeon Powell cried:

"A negress, by Heaven!"

Then he added:

"No, I believe she wears a black veil."

Straight toward the rock she rode, and the two men were now running to meet her.

The hail of the woman had been heard by the two horsemen, yet nearly a mile away from the scene of ambush.

They had also seen the two men spring from behind the rock and run toward the range.

They then beheld the woman in black and the two led horses.

Instantly they had come to a halt, to take observations.

Surgeon Powell knew that he could reach the two men flying along on foot, that his rifle would bring one down at that distance.

But he had lowered the weapon he had half raised to his shoulder.

They were foiled in their intention, and the Surgeon Scout was not a man to take life when there was no need of it.

Then, too, he would not fire to kill in the presence of a woman.

But who was the woman, and who were the men?

They were white men, clad in buckskin, wore broad-brimmed hats, and their hair was long, their faces heavily bearded.

But why should white men fire on Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill?

Were they outlaws?

If so, what was the woman doing in their presence, going to their rescue?

The Surgeon Scout felt that he and Silent Sam were at a disadvantage.

The two fugitives did not appear to have seen them.

The Man Killer had doubtless started the woman in flight out of the canyon; yet if he had seen her he had not fired upon her, nor had he prevented her going to the rescue of her companions, for such they must be, as she led their horses to them.

His own horses the Surgeon Scout could not get down from the range without going back to the trail.

Yet he must make some effort to halt those two men.

"Go back to the horses and ride along the range, Sam, for they may go that way when they mount."

"I will meet you on the plain, and we may catch them between ourselves and our coming pards, for the latter are again moving," cried the Surgeon Scout, and while Silent Sam ran back to the horses to obey, Frank Powell bounded on down the range to its base, and suddenly called out:

"Halt!"

"Hands up there, for you are covered!"

The two men, now nearing the woman and their horses, did halt.

They were taken by surprise.

What had caused the dash of the woman in black out of the canyon they did not know.

But the voice of the Surgeon Scout was something tangible to act upon.

So they involuntarily halted.

The Surgeon Scout appeared as he spoke, and the two men and the woman, who also glanced toward him, saw a man in uniform.

Soldiers were not wont to go alone far from the fort.

There must be others near.

At least, such seemed to be the thoughts of the two fugitives, while the woman cried:

"Mount and fly, for the love of God, fly!"

The two men were already again upon the jump for the horses.

Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill also were coming on at a run.

"Halt, I command you!" shouted Surgeon Powell.

But he did not fire.

He did not care to kill a man who was not attacking him, nor to fire on them in the presence of the woman, whoever she might be.

Perhaps they might not have intended to kill the two coming scouts.

Again the Surgeon Scout commanded them to halt.

But in vain, and he half decided to drop their two horses with a shot.

But this thought came to him too late, for the next instant the woman had met them with the led horses, and, mounting with a bound, they wheeled straight across the plain and went flying along like the wind.

And the Surgeon Scout could not pursue, for Silent Sam had not yet appeared with the horses, and the two scouts were yet some distance away, with Man Killer nowhere in sight.

CHAPTER XI.

A MYSTERY.

"A complete failure, and through a woman's act!"

"Who is she, I wonder. Oh, that Silent Sam could get here with the horses, for we could run down those fellows with the little start they have."

So muttered the Surgeon Scout, as he stood watching alternately the Woman in Black and the two men she had saved rapidly riding over the plain, then the approaching scouts, and next for the appearance of Silent Sam and the Indian chief.

As he gazed toward the two horsemen

he had said were Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, he saw them suddenly press forward at a more rapid rate.

"They have seen the woman, and doubtless regard her as a captive of the two men. But they are too far away to be of much service—ah! one of them is coming on alone.

"It is Buffalo Bill, and he is heading so as to cut across after those fellows and the woman. I must head him off.

"Ah! there comes Silent Sam over the ridge now."

But not waiting for Silent Sam, the Surgeon Scout ran rapidly out upon the plain to head off Buffalo Bill.

He was seen by the latter, and yet no halt was made by the horseman until Doctor Powell stopped short and uttered a long, thrilling cry.

Instantly the horseman drew rein, and the next moment rode directly toward Frank Powell, who said:

"I thought he would know that war cry, even if he did not recognize me."

The Woman in Black and her comrades had evidently heard the war cry of the Surgeon Scout, also, for they at once began to press their horses the harder.

The scout, however, came on, and so did Silent Sam, as rapidly as he dared lead the horses down the steep ridge trail.

The Indian, however, had not yet appeared in sight, and Surgeon Powell began to dread that there were others in the canyon and some harm had befallen him.

Taking the whole situation in carefully, Frank Powell saw that the fugitives would have all of three miles start by the time Buffalo Bill and Silent Sam reached the spot where he awaited them.

Their horses appeared to be fresh, and with the start they had it would be useless to attempt a pursuit, with a view to immediate capture, though they could be trailed, he felt sure.

After a few moments Buffalo Bill came up at a run, and threw himself from his saddle, while he called out:

"Frank Powell, by the Gods of War!

"I knew that war cry, though I had not recognized you before."

"Yes, Bill, I came out to meet you, and was just in time to save you from riding into an ambush. It is Wild Bill with you?"

"Yes, indeed. But what was the ambush, Pard Frank?"

"Yonder two men."

"There is a lady with them, kidnapped, I suppose, so we must rescue her."

"The Lord only knows who she is, for she does not come from the fort, and more, but for her we would have caught or killed those two men."

"It may not be a woman."

"No doubt of that, I feel sure, Bill."

"The men I saw run from yonder rock."

"Yes, and we're in ambush there, waiting for you and Wild Bill."

"Who can they be?"

"I'd like to know."

"Did no one at the fort know of my coming?"

"No one who would wish to kill you—in fact, Colonel Thorp alone knew of it."

"And the woman?"

"She came out of yonder canyon, whither I sent one of my pards, an Indian chief."

"Ah!"

"He must have run upon her, and I fear met with trouble, for he is not in sight, and she dashed out, calling to the two men in ambush and leading their horses.

"I had seen you coming, and caught sight of the men in ambush."

"Who is that coming?"

"Silent Sam, an old trapper, and my pard on this trail, for I not only came out to meet you, Bill, but to get your aid in a most mysterious affair."

"I'm with you, Pard Frank, and Wild Bill will be, too."

"I was sure of that, Cody."

"But we cannot catch yonder fugitives

before dark, though we can take their trail."

"Oh, yes, but I must know the fate of my Indian pard first, and our camp outfit is over beyond the ridge."

"And you have no idea who those two men can be, Pard Frank?"

"Outlaws, doubtless."

"It may be, but the woman?"

"That is what puzzles me, Bill."

"I have heard of a woman who has been seen on various trails, always alone, dressed in black, as yonder one appears to be, riding a black horse, as she does, and the superstitious ones assert that she always brings trouble, death, and disaster."

"Well, in this case we will bring it, if we can corral her and her two pards."

"But your Indian chief may have already proven that the story about her is true."

"Ah! that is so—we must find out what has become of him," answered Frank Powell, just as Wild Bill rode up, leading a well-laden pack horse.

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS WOMAN.

The coming up of Wild Bill brought together there upon the plain a trio of most striking-looking men.

Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill, and Frank Powell!

Where could be found their equals for magnificent physique, splendid courage, and nobleness of nature?

They were phenomenal specimens of true bordermen.

They were men to do and dare any danger, yet possessed hearts as gentle as a woman's, and were ever ready to stretch forth the right hand of fellowship to a comrade or risk life to aid him.

Buffalo Bill was a picture to gaze upon, with his graceful form, broad shoulders, long hair, picturesque attire, and a face as handsome as an Adonis.

Wild Bill was his counterpart in manly beauty.

Surgeon Powell, with a sterner face, tinged with a certain sadness, tall, erect, a giant in strength, well matched the other two border giants.

Wild Bill has crossed the Great Divide—died with his boots on, but he has left his name indelibly stamped upon the page of frontier history.

Surgeon Powell is to-day a prominent physician of La Crosse, Wisconsin, admired and beloved by all who know his real worth.

Buffalo Bill stands to-day as a living example of what he was capable of, and seemed to know, from the time he was a Boy Scout until he had won a record that the wide world knows.

Such were the three men who thus met upon the plains.

Heroes, each of them, and but for the keen eye and quick act of Surgeon Powell, two of them might then and there have fallen under the deadly aim of ambushed assassins.

Wild Bill and Surgeon Powell had been pards in the past, and the two warmly clasped hands.

Then Buffalo Bill quickly explained the situation to Wild Bill, and added:

"You know, Pard Frank, we were on our way to see you at Fort Benham, for I so wrote you."

"Oh, yes, and I came out to meet you, for just now I preferred not to have you seen in the fort."

"As you please; but our motive was a double one in coming, for we wished your aid in a mysterious trail we wish to follow."

"It is a coincidence that I need your aid, also, in a most mysterious affair, pards."

"Wonder if it can be the same?"

"Telling is knowing."

"Well, we are on a woman's trail."

"Ah!"

"I think we have hit her here, too, for we last heard that she had come down toward Benham."

"Is it my Woman in Black?"

"It looks so."

"You know her, then?"

"We know that such a woman has been haunting the neighborhood of several forts in the past two years, and it has been impossible to track her, or to find out who and what she is.

"By what we can learn of her, we have set her down as an avenger, and though she has never been seen save alone, we are sure that she has a strong backing.

"First, she appeared up in Utah, then in Colorado, and now she has come down into Colorado."

"She has held up coaches single handed, for no one else has been seen with her, and after carefully scrutinizing the passengers, she has allowed them to go on unmolested."

"Does not rob, eh?"

"Yes, but not individuals. She has robbed coaches of Government money, and that only, while on three occasions she has taken life, but in each case it has been a negro soldier she has killed."

"A negro soldier?" cried Surgeon Powell, with considerable excitement in tone and manner, something wholly at variance with his accustomed calm mien.

"Yes, a colored soldier."

"Were there other soldiers along at the time?"

"Yes, in some instances."

"White soldiers, for instance?"

"Yes."

"And she has shot only negro soldiers?"

"Yes."

"I will have something to tell you both upon this very subject after a while, and it would not surprise me, after all, if we had not the same game in view.

"But you came this way, then, to try and find out something about this mysterious woman?"

"Yes, Doc."

"It would be remarkable if yonder woman is your game and mine; but when did you hear of her last?"

"Two weeks ago, when she held up a coach, got ten thousand in Uncle Sam's money, killed a negro sergeant, and was tracked in this direction for two days, and then her trail was lost.

"We went back determined to come here, for we next expected to have her strike a blow at Benham, and I wrote you we were coming."

"Yes."

"We saw that woman but indistinctly, and believed she was some one from the fort, who had been kidnapped, for never before did we hear of the one we are on the trail of being seen except alone.

"Now, what do you know of her, Doc?"

"Next to nothing," and Surgeon Powell told of his discovery of the two scouts, then of the men in ambush, his return for his two allies, and what had followed, expressing his fear that harm had befallen the Indian chief, Man Killer.

"We will soon know. But could that Woman in Black have known that we were on her trail, and have put those two men in ambush to stop us?"

"It would seem so; but how could she have found it out?"

"Oh, there was open talk at the fort of our coming, and we were days late in getting off, for we were delayed."

"Then she doubtless had allies in the fort who kept her posted. But here comes Silent Sam," and up came the trapper with the horses.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND.

"See anything of Man Killer, Sam?" called out Surgeon Powell, as the trapper rode up.

"No."

"Sam, I wish you to know my two pards here, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill."

"Yes, mighty glad."

The old trapper fastened his eyes upon first one, then the other.

He took them in from head to foot.

He seemed satisfied with his inspection, and offered his hand in silence.

The two scouts had also taken him in most thoroughly.

They saw a man who was an enigma to them from the very first.

"I know you both—who don't?" said Silent Sam, in his abrupt way.

"And I am glad that we are now going to know you, Silent Sam, while I am sure Surgeon Powell has been wise in the selection of an ally in you," said Buffalo Bill.

"Don't know, maybe not."

"We think he was," Wild Bill remarked, considerably impressed with the old trapper.

"Well, Sam, we were fortunate in finding our friends as we did, and if I mistake not, they know more about yonder woman than we do."

Silent Sam glanced toward the woman and her companions, now far in the distance, but made no response.

"It seems that a mysterious Woman in Black has been playing the killing act, and robbing the coaches of Government money, up to the north of us."

"That's not woman's work."

"No, Sam, but this one done it, if, indeed, she proves to be a woman."

"Can't tell."

"No. But now let us go and see what has become of our pard, the Indian."

Silent Sam made no reply, and, mounting his own horse, Doctor Powell rode off by the side of Buffalo Bill.

Wild Bill followed, leading his pack horse, while Silent Sam led the animal of the chief.

Straight to the mouth of the canyon which the Man Killer had been sent to reconnoitre rode Surgeon Powell, telling Buffalo Bill as they went along just how matters stood and expressing the dread that they would find the Indian had been killed when they reached the spot, still half a mile distant.

"You know the redskin descended into the canyon from the range, Bill, for I had an idea, from the two men being ambushed where they were that their horses must be back in shelter somewhere within easy reach."

"Now, the canyon was not over a mile away from them, and hence I sent the redskin there."

"As Silent Sam and I came down the range we saw the woman, and she dashed right out of the canyon and was leading the two horses of her companions."

"She must have seen you, then."

"Now, but I think she saw the Indian, and that started her after her companions."

"Did you hear no shot?"

"No, the wind was blowing toward her, and in a canyon thick with pines the sound might have been smothered, you know."

"Very true."

"Then, too, there might have been others in the canyon, for they could have left it, hidden by the undergrowth along the base of the range."

"Yes, or still be there."

"Ah! It would be well to go slow."

"Yes. We are on the trail of the woman's horse and the two led animals, you see."

"Yes. I will dismount and go up the range to have a look down into the canyon, for we do not wish to ride into an ambush."

"No. But Silent Sam will go." And calling to the trapper, the Surgeon Scout asked him to dismount, go to the range, and climb up until he could reconnoitre the canyon.

The trapper at once obeyed, leaving his horse to be led by Buffalo Bill, when they went on.

It was not far to the range, and he soon disappeared in the fringe of undergrowth at its base.

The scouts out on the plain waited for him for half an hour, and yet no call came to them to advance.

"Can he, too, have fallen into a trap?" asked Wild Bill.

"If he does not soon appear, we will ourselves find out what the reason is," remarked Surgeon Powell, who, as an officer, was to be the leader of the party, though when on a scout with his old

comrades, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, he never stood on rank, and they never addressed him by his title.

After waiting some time longer, they were about to move forward, when they suddenly saw Silent Sam come out of the entrance of the canyon.

He silently beckoned to them, and they rode on at a gallop. "Well, Sam, have you made any discovery?" asked Surgeon Powell as they drew near.

"Found him," was the laconic response of Silent Sam, and he turned and led the way back into the canyon, followed by the others, wondering what they were to discover.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

The mouth of the canyon was filled with pines, and within a short distance was a meadow, a large spring of water, yet so situated in the rocky cliff that it was not accessible to any animal smaller than a horse, that could reach up to it.

The overflow ran into a subterranean passage, and disappeared.

The spot was a good camping place for men, but not a watering place for game.

And right here was the Indian found.

He was lying on the ground bound hand and foot.

But he was conscious, and nodded to the party as they came up, for he could not speak.

In his mouth was a gag, tied there in such a way as to prevent all utterance.

Very quickly did Surgeon Powell unbind the Indian and relieve him of the gag in his mouth, while Buffalo Bill gave him a drink of water from the spring, where he had just filled his canteen.

By the side of the redskin lay his rifle, belt of arms, his bow and arrows, for they had not been taken by his captor, whoever that captor was.

When he could speak the Man Killer did so.

He had risen to his feet, showing no sign of having been hurt, though his necklace of human bones had been broken.

"The Man Killer has met many foes, was caught in a trap, to be thus treated," said the Surgeon Scout quietly.

"The Man Killer was caught with a lariat, while standing there." And the Indian pointed to a rock some ten feet high, and upon which he had halted when making his way down the steep sides of the canyon.

"A lariat caught you?"

"The White Beaver speaks straight."

"Did you not see the one who threw it?"

"The lasso caught me about the neck, and I was dragged into the valley. The senses of the Man Killer went away with the fall."

"Then you did not see the one who lassoed you?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Senses came back."

"Ah!"

"But while you were unconscious you were bound and gagged?"

The Indian nodded.

"There was a woman here?"

"Yes."

"And she had others with her?"

The redskin shook his head.

"Do you mean to say that she was alone?"

"Only white squaw."

"Who threw the lasso?"

"White squaw."

"Who bound and gagged you?"

"White squaw."

The Surgeon Scout looked incredulous. Glancing toward Buffalo Bill, he saw that he had heard all, but his face revealed no sign of what he thought.

"There must have been others, Bill, that the chief did not see."

The Man Killer had taken in both Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill with a look of greater interest than he was wont to exhibit.

He seemed to be mentally taking the measure of two men of whom he had

heard so much, who were the terror of hostile Indians.

"If caught with a lariat and dragged from that rock, Frank, the chief must have been badly stunned, and when he came to found himself bound and gagged, so could not have seen others," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, that was it, Bill."

"No, only white squaw," said the Indian.

"You did not see any one else?"

"No one but white squaw here," continued the chief.

"Have him tell us just what happened, Doctor," said Wild Bill, who was deeply interested in the situation.

"Yes, Man Killer, tell us all you know."

"White Beaver tell me come down into canyon. Me came."

"Stop on rock, see nobody, lasso come quick, catch me here, pull me down there. Me know nothing—like sleep—like dead man."

"Me wake up and see white squaw."

"She take lasso and have me tie tight."

"Have mouth shut up close—have Man Killer's gun and all there."

"Tell me not to follow her trail, or Man Killer and his comrade all die."

"Then she mount horse yonder in thicket, have two other ponies there, and go with all out of canyon."

"That all."

This was plain enough, though told in broken sentences and in the peculiar English the chief spoke.

"And you saw no one else?"

"Only squaw and ponies."

"See no trail more."

Buffalo Bill had been looking about for trails.

The soil was such that all trails were visible.

But a search revealed only the tracks of three horses, those the woman had, and the footmarks made by a strikingly small foot.

"White squaw have iron hands—strong like big chief—have black mist cover over face, but Man Killer see plain all right."

"She wore a black veil, from the Man Killer's description, Frank."

"Yes, Bill, but who and what is she, for those tracks were made by the small feet of a woman—not a man, as we supposed it might be, in disguise; but we will camp here, for Silent Sam will ride back to our camping place over the ridge and get the pack animal and outfit."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL.

Silent Sam readily consented to go after the horse and outfit left at the other camp.

He had uttered no word while the Indian had told his story.

What he thought he did not make known until Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, Pard Sam, what do you think of that white squaw who bested our red comrade?"

"Bad medicine for womankind."

"You are right. She is one to look after."

"Yes, bad women are more to fear than bad men."

With this Silent Sam started off for the camp over the range, going on foot, as he felt he could make better time.

The Man Killer seemed to be considerably broken up by his strange adventure.

The fact that a white squaw had lassoed him, bound and gagged him, could have killed and scalped him, was a very severe blow to his pride.

He looked at the rock where he had been standing, then at the one where the small tracks showed that the woman had been in hiding.

She had evidently discovered him coming down the steep sides of the canyon, and lay in wait for him.

She had for some reason preferred to use her lasso to a rifle or revolver.

Why she knew best, but surely she could have killed him had she cared to.

So the Man Killer sat and seemed to brood over his misfortune most bitterly. There appeared to be a dread in his heart that he would not be regarded by his white comrades with the same respect as before.

This Buffalo Bill seemed to realize, and he sat down by the disconsolate chief, gave him a pipeful of tobacco, and talked with him in a way to reassure him.

In this he was but partially successful, for the sting of wounded pride remained.

Surgeon Powell meanwhile had made a thorough search of the canyon, but with the result that he became convinced that no others had been in the canyon save the woman and her two companions.

They had certainly come there with the purpose of ambushing Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill.

In some way they had known of their coming and had gone there to lie in wait for them.

Wild Bill had in the meanwhile gotten wood together and built a fire, after which he had staked out his own and his comrades' horses.

It would be a wait of a couple of hours, all knew, before the return of Silent Sam, and it was decided to have supper there and push right on after the two men and their mysterious feminine companion.

They might have to make a dry camp of it for the night, but then the horses had had a good rest and water and could readily stand it, while it would put them miles on their way in following the trail of the fugitives.

Silent Sam made good time and came in with the pack animal and half-cooked dinner of the other camp.

He reported that the three fugitives were nowhere in sight from the range, and he had used his glass in looking for them.

"That means that they have gone into hiding somewhere."

"But we will push on after them until too dark to see their trail, and then camp," said Surgeon Powell.

"And be half a dozen miles nearer to them when day breaks to-morrow," Buffalo Bill added.

Supper was soon prepared, the canteens filled with fresh water, the animals given all they would drink, and, with the sun over an hour above the horizon, the start was made.

The trail was soon picked up and readily followed, and, intending to halt at nightfall, the pace set by Surgeon Powell was a brisk one, to make as great a distance as possible before darkness came on.

"I wonder if they are in hiding somewhere in breaks in the plain and watching us, knowing that night will compel us to give up following their trail?" said Buffalo Bill as the halt was made, just as darkness came on.

And the others seemed to be wondering the same way.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE SURPRISE OF A NIGHT.

The spot chosen for a camp for the night was in the open plain, just where there was a group of large boulders scattered there by nature's act long ages before.

The horses would have neither grass or water, save a little of the former which the Indian had cut in the canyon and brought along in a blanket.

They were staked out not far away, and each animal was given his little ration of the grass.

Amid the group of boulders the men spread their blankets, and a small fire was built of dry sticks brought along for the purpose by Wild Bill from the canyon.

Coffee was boiled, bacon broiled, and a light supper was had by the men.

Then Silent Sam went on duty as guard, the Indian to relieve him for half the night, and the rest rolled themselves in their blankets and were soon fast asleep.

It was decided to make an early start, be in the saddle to pick up the trail

with the first glimmer of dawn, and so the Indian, who would be then on duty, was to call them in time, and they would press on until a stream was found and a camp made to have breakfast.

It was not Silent Sam who called the redskin when the time came for him to go on watch, for the Man Killer was trained to wake at will.

Rising from his blankets, he walked about in search of Silent Sam.

He did not see him near the camp.

Nor did he see the horses.

What had become of the guard?

What had become of the horses?

The latter had not been over a hundred feet from where the men slept.

Their tramping could be readily heard by any one awake.

But the horses were not there.

The Indian ran back and gave the alarm.

In an instant Surgeon Powell, Buffalo Bill, and Wild Bill were upon their feet, their weapons in hand.

"What is it, Man Killer?"

"Silent Sam gone!"

"Gone!"

"Ponies gone!"

"The horses gone too?"

"All gone."

It was a surprise and a startling one.

"But gone where?"

"Man Killer don't know. Wake up to watch. No find Silent Sam, no find ponies. Then call White Beaver."

This was all there was to tell.

What had happened was to be found out.

They all ran to where the horses had been left.

They were gone. Their stakes had been pulled up.

It was too dark to see a trail, so Buffalo Bill ran to his pack and got a lantern, while Surgeon Powell did likewise.

These were flashed over the ground, and in the sandy soil the tracks were to be seen.

They led in the direction that the trail did which the woman and two men had left.

After advancing a few hundred yards by the aid of the lanterns, Surgeon Powell said:

"We must not leave our camp unguarded."

"It would not be wise," said Buffalo Bill.

"Go back, Man Killer, and stay in camp."

The Indian turned and silently obeyed.

The others then pushed on with the lanterns, revealing the trail.

A couple of hundred yards further they came to a divide.

It was some twenty feet deep, as many wide, and the trail led down into and through a break worn by water when it rained.

Down into the divide they went, Buffalo Bill remarking:

"This is where they were lying in wait for us when we halted at nightfall, for we could not see the divide, while they had their eyes upon us."

"Yes, and it was well we halted where we did," added Wild Bill.

"You see, pards, that the trail of those we followed, and also of the horses, lead down into this divide."

"Yes, doctor."

"This is near the head of the divide, so we can only go down it."

"True."

"Then we must be careful and put out our lanterns, for we may walk into a trap."

"Right you are, Pard Frank," said Buffalo Bill, and he added:

"But we will go down into the divide first, and start from there in the dark."

"That will be best."

Down the steep way they went to the bottom of the divide.

There they all came to a sudden halt.

And it was not to be wondered at, for a form lay in their path.

A flash of the lanterns in his face revealed the fact that it was Silent Sam.

Apparently not placing confidence in his powers of silence, whoever had thus

left him had securely gagged him beyond all power of speech.

And he was securely bound, too, feet and hands, with a lariat.

But Silent Sam's eyes were wide open and fixed upon his three comrades as they hastily went to work to free him of the gag and unbind him.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

When Silent Sam had taken a few swallows of water from Wild Bill's canteen he was able to speak.

Yet it was very plain to his companions that his adventure had not caused him excitement enough to have him break out in a quick recital of what had happened.

More silent than an Indian even, he calmly waited for Surgeon Powell to speak.

Half angry at this, the Surgeon Scout asked:

"Come, Sam, tell us what has happened, and lose no time about it."

"I don't know."

The response was so quietly uttered it was provoking in the extreme.

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Have you no explanation to offer for our finding you here?"

"I'll tell you. Maybe I was asleep, fer I was leaning on a boulder, and I felt a blow. Don't know any more, but when I came to was like you found me."

"Who did it?"

Silent Sam seemed tired at saying so much.

He raised his hand to the back of his head.

The Surgeon Scout put his hand there and felt a large lump.

"You were struck from behind, and it must have been a stunning blow, though the scalp is not cut, nor is the bone fractured. Your hat and thick growth of hair saved you."

"Who did it?"

"That is for us to find out."

"How did you know?"

"The Indian went in search of you, and, not finding you, awoke us."

"Where is he?"

"Back in camp."

"Horses all right?"

"No, they have been run off."

"Who did it?"

"We do not know. But here is their trail, and the woman and her comrades must have done it."

"Maybe so." And Silent Sam seemed bewildered.

A short consultation followed, and it was decided that Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill were to push on down the divide with one lantern, which, however, was not to be lighted, and Wild Bill and the Man Killer were to remain there, keeping the other lantern lit in case of quick need.

Off started the Surgeon and Buffalo Bill, going slowly and watchful of all the way ahead.

They did not know at what moment they might run upon an ambush.

They realized that they were in a bad way, left on the plain without horses, and with many a mile between them and the fort.

They could not blame Silent Sam, for certainly not one of them had suspected an attack upon their camp, and really had seen no need for the guard.

It had been merely a precaution; that was all.

Whoever had dealt the blow given Silent Sam had seen the party go into camp, knew the exact situation of those that had turned in for the night, of the horses and the guard, and so had acted.

On went the two men on their scout, knowing that the horses had gone that way, as, having been led down into the divide, they could not get out of it, thus far at least.

As they went along they could see that the banks of the divide grew less and less in height.

The plain seemed to be sloping the way they went.

At length they came to where the divide merged into the plain, save for a waterway.

It was dark, but the keen eyes of Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill, trained to night service, could detect a dark line beyond them they knew was timber.

If trees, they either were upon the banks of a stream or water was not far away.

On they went, until they knew that they were fully two miles from where they had left Wild Bill and Silent Sam.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill halted and said: "There are horses yonder."

Carefully they approached the dark line of trees, and came upon a number of horses staked out.

They were seven in number.

They were the lost horses.

The trees bordered a small stream, and the animals were feeding upon the grass that grew upon the banks.

But those who had stolen the horses and left them there were nowhere to be seen.

"A lucky find this, Bill."

"Yes, indeed. I'll leave your horse and take the rest back to bring the outfit and our pards, for this is a good camping place."

"Yes, and I'll wait here and reconnoitre," said Surgeon Powell.

Back went Buffalo Bill, leading the horses and riding bareback, for the saddles and bridles were in the camp.

He came to where Wild Bill and Silent Sam waited, explained how he and Surgeon Powell had found the animals, and then all went on to camp.

"Ho! Man Killer, where are you?" called out the Chief of Scouts as he rode up.

But no answer came, and a quick cry from Wild Bill told that he had made a discovery.

It was the Man Killer lying upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN UNSEEN FOE.

It was a fact that the Man Killer lay upon the ground, and yet was not asleep.

He lay by a large rock, and when Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill had sprung from their horses and bent over him they found that he had a lariat noose about his neck.

It was drawn fairly taut, and he was breathing hard.

The other end lay coiled near, as though the one who had surprised the Indian had supposed him to be dead.

Quickly Buffalo Bill drew the lasso from about the Indian, poured water from his canteen upon his face, and rubbed the neck hard to start circulation.

The scouts were certainly nonplussed at their discovery, and Wild Bill and Silent Sam had at once sprung away to try and get some clue to this most mysterious and unknown foe who thus far was certainly showing that he dare beard even the Border Kings in their dens.

It was some minutes before the Indian revived sufficiently to move, and then he suddenly arose to a sitting posture and looked about him like one returning from the verge of Shadowland.

"Well, Man Killer, what is it?"

The scout asked the question in a kindly tone.

The Indian looked all around him, then said in an inquiring way:

"Chief not dead?"

"Oh, no. You are worth a dozen dead men yet."

"What happened?"

"Me don't know."

"Then who does, for we found you here on your back, half choked to death with this lariat about your neck?"

"Don't know."

"Did you see no one?"

"No."

"Were you struck a blow?"

The chief put his hands over his head, as though to feel for a cut or bruise.

"Where were you?"

"Here."

"You saw no one?"

"No."

"You must have been struck down from behind."

"No, not knocked. Lasso come quick and pull me back on rock. Go to sleep then."

"That's about it."

"You were lassoed from behind and dragged back hard on this rock, being choked at the same time."

"Yes, know now."

"But who did it?"

The chief shook his head sadly.

"Well, Man Killer, pull yourself together, for we must get out of this, for we found the horses two miles away on a stream, and Chief White Beaver is there. We have got to deal with foes as cunning as foxes and dangerous as a mountain lion, but we'll find them out yet. They do not seem to wish to kill us and work in the dark and most mysteriously, but we'll catch them yet."

"Bimeby, all right."

"We will." And Buffalo Bill called to Wild Bill, who was just coming back, and told him that the Indian did not know who had lassoed him, it had been done so suddenly.

"Then he did not see his foe?"

"No."

"Too bad, for it gives us no clue as to who we have to deal with."

"That's so, Bill, but I can vouch for you and Beaver that we are not to be set back on account of an unseen foe."

"This Indian and Silent Sam have been the ones to have to suffer so far, but I do not believe they will back out now."

"Don't see bad man. Maybe kill next time," said the Indian.

"Well, Man Killer, whoever our unseen foe is, he is simply playing a game you have often played to a finish, as all of us have, and it don't scare us a little bit."

"We'll find him yet."

"Maybe so, bimeby."

"We have got to."

"That's our business, and I'm getting interested," said Wild Bill, but he whispered to his pard:

"I'm afraid that redskin's two lariat experiences with the foe are going to scare him into taking the back trail, Bill."

"I don't think so. But here comes Silent Sam, and we'll see what he has to say."

"Mighty little, if what I've heard him say is a sample of his talking powers."

Silent Sam came up and glanced at the Indian, as though surprised not to find him dead, but he made no comment.

"We resurrected him, Sam," said Buffalo Bill.

"I see."

Buffalo Bill then told him that the Indian could give no account of how he had been surprised and choked.

"What do you think, Sam?"

"Don't know—yet."

"You did not see any cue?"

"No."

"Well, we'll pack up and start for the camp, where White Beaver is awaiting us, for Man Killer appears to be all right."

"Man Killer feel good," replied the Indian.

The packs were soon strapped upon the horses, the men mounted, and in half an hour they came in sight of the spot on the stream where Buffalo Bill had left the Surgeon Scout.

Neither White Beaver nor his horse was to be seen.

Calling to him, Buffalo Bill received no answer, and in alarm the four scouts at once set out upon the search for the missing Surgeon Scout, dreading that their unseen foe had again played a bold, perhaps a fatal game.

CHAPTER XIX.

MISSING.

Under ordinary circumstances Buffalo Bill would not have been alarmed at the absence of Surgeon Powell from the place where he had left him.

He would have supposed that he had gone off on some scout, from something he had seen or heard.

But with the experience of the Indian in the canyon, at the hands of the Woman in Black, remembering the blow dealt Silent Sam by an unseen foe, the running off of the horses, the finding of Man Killer unconscious in their camp while they were in search of their enemies, the scout dreaded the worst for a minute.

He feared that Surgeon Powell had also met the unknown foe and had come to grief.

"Wild Bill, we must at once see what has become of White Beaver."

"Silent Sam, you and the Indian both remain in camp here and keep your eyes and ears open."

With this order Buffalo Bill and wild Bill rode off together.

"We have gotten into a whole nest of mysteries, it seems, Pard Bill," said Wild Bill as they rode down the stream, for above the way was too rugged for horses.

"Well, I should think so, from the finding of the Woman in Black here, those two men lying in wait to kill us, and what has happened since, not to speak of what White Beaver tells us of the Unknown Avenger, who is of the Black Troopers."

"Well, every trail has an end, and this mysterious one must also."

"We will not leave it until we see the end, Wild Bill."

"Yes, the end of the trail or our own end," was the significant response of Wild Bill.

"Not getting superstitious, are you, pard?"

"You bet no, but that redskin is."

"Yes, he is scared, beyond a doubt."

"And what about that talkative fellow, Silent Sam?"

"I don't quite know what to make of him."

"Nor I. But he wasn't born in the woods to be scared by an owl."

"So I think, and I'll guess he'll stick."

"Hope so, for I guess he knows this country as no other man does."

"And so does the Indian."

"Yes, both will be invaluable, if they stick, but Doc Powell knows them better than we do."

"Yet Doc Powell did not look for this turning of the tables upon us, and just now he's not to be found."

Buffalo Bill halted suddenly.

"Bill, we are making a mistake to go away from the camp in this darkness."

"Maybe so."

"The Surgeon Scout said he would wait there for me, and, as he is not to be found, my idea is that he has made some discovery and is trailing it."

"I guess you are right."

"His horse is gone, and that looks as though he had ridden away, while, if anything had happened to him, we would doubtless have found him in camp dead or as we found the others."

With this Buffalo Bill turned his horse back toward the camp.

They had gone over half a mile from where they had pitched their camp, and upon the return, at the suggestion of Buffalo Bill, separated.

One went back up the river bank, the other on the edge of the timber that skirted the stream.

Buffalo Bill, following the winding of the bank, saw that as far as they had gone the stream could not be crossed there, for it was a dozen or more feet down to the water.

Right where the camp was there was a crossing, for the bank had a break in it, through which he expected to find a trail leading when light enough to discover it.

Coming out at last upon the spot where they had left the horses and their two

comrades, Buffalo Bill saw the dim outline of a horse and rider out upon the plain beyond the timber.

"Ho! pard, is that you?"

"Yes."

"But where are the horses and our comrades, for this is surely the camping place where we left them," answered Wild Bill.

"You have not seen them?"

"Not I."

"Then where are they, indeed?"

"Say, pard," called out Wild Bill as he came forward.

"I'll just dismount and let you kick me a few times, to see if am really awake and not dreaming, for the way things are going I cannot believe I am awake."

CHAPTER XX.

AN ALARM.

"You need not have me kick you, Wild Bill, for you are awake, and so am I," said Buffalo Bill, with a light laugh.

"It's lucky no black troops are with us, or they'd stampede."

"I wonder if Silent Sam and the Indian have."

"They surely would not have taken our cattle."

"Oh, no. I was joking, for I have confidence in them both yet. But they have certainly disappeared, and the pack horses, too."

"They have, indeed, and it looks bad."

"White Beaver vouched for them, and that is enough for me."

"Me, too."

"But what is to be done, Pard Cody?"

"I hardly know what to say. Let us see if the outfit is here."

They dismounted, and a search revealed the two pack saddles.

Wood had been gathered to build a fire, the saddles of both Silent Sam and the Indian were there, their bridles as well.

Also their roll of blankets, with the rest of the outfit.

"Couldn't have driven the cattle to water, Pard?" asked Wild Bill.

"No, for they could reach the river not a hundred yards away."

"Then what?"

"I give it up."

"May be the brutes stampeded, and the Indian and Silent Sam followed them."

"I guess that's about it."

"Then we stay here?"

"I don't know just what else we can do for the present."

"All things come to those who wait is a legend I've heard somewhere, pard."

"Then we'll wait and see what comes to us."

With this they staked out their horses. Then Buffalo Bill lighted a fire, and a bright blaze sent its rays out upon the plain and through the timber.

"We had better not hug this fire too close, Pard Cody, for reasons," suggested Wild Bill.

"Right you are. We'll keep in the shadow after the warnings we have had to-night."

They lighted their pipes, spread their blankets back in the timber, and waited, chatting together in a low tone the while.

About half an hour passed, and the night was slowly creeping away, and dawn was but an hour off.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill saw his horse raise his head and stand in a listening attitude.

"He hears something."

"You bet he does. Some one is surely coming."

"Yes, and not a foe."

"How do you know?"

"If it was a danger signal Comrade would at once try to get that lariat pin up to come and warn me. He knows what he is about."

The horse then lowered his head again and went on feeding.

"It was a false alarm."

"No, some one is coming—either our two queer pards or Surgeon Powell."

"I hope the latter, for we could lose

the other two without any deep grief on our part," Wild Bill remarked.

"We will find them when daylight comes, Bill—hark!"

The sound came indistinctly to their ears of a horse coming over the hard plain.

It grew louder and louder, showing that the horse was approaching and doubtless guided by the firelight.

"It is the doctor," said Buffalo Bill.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"How so, pard?"

"If it was a stranger Comrade would be uneasy."

"He has scented the horse of White Beaver beyond a doubt."

"You've got it down fine, Pard Bill."

"Wait and see."

In a few more minutes the iron-shod hoofs were ringing out clear in the night air as they fell upon the flinty soil of the plain.

Then into the arc of light from the fire came a horse and rider.

"Good!" cried Buffalo Bill as he recognized the horseman.

"It is Surgeon Powell, but, by Jove! that is not his horse!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"If it is, he is white with foam from hard riding," remarked Wild Bill.

"His horse is a bay; that one is an iron gray—another mystery." And the two pards sprang to their feet and advanced to meet the Surgeon Scout, calling out a welcome to him as they did so.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SURGEON SCOUT'S STRANGE ADVENTURE.

When Buffalo Bill rode away from the stream where the horses had been found staked out, with no one to be seen near, Doctor Powell was left alone to hold the camp until the great scout's return with the others of the party and the outfit.

The Surgeon Scout listened to the dying away of the hoof paces upon the flinty plain, and was just thinking of hiding his horse in the timber and lying in wait to see if those who had captured the animals would return for them, for he could not believe that they would leave them there, when a sound came to his ear that caused him to listen with rapt attention.

It was the ring of iron-shod hoofs upon the plain.

In an instant he was on the alert.

It could not be the scout returning, as he at first believed.

The sound did come from that direction, it was true, but why should Buffalo Bill be coming back so soon?

Then, too, there was surely but one horse, from the ring of the hoofs.

The horse was coming at a gallop, and straight toward the spot where he stood.

His horse pricked up his ears, and seemed uneasy, for, like the animal belonging to Buffalo Bill, the one that belonged to the Surgeon Scout was thoroughly well trained, and was as good as a watchdog in camp.

He gave a low whinny, and this convinced the Surgeon Scout that whoever it was that was coming was not one of his party.

"I have the advantage of position and being forewarned," muttered Surgeon Powell as he loosened his revolver in his belt, for he had left his rifle in camp.

"All right, Sioux Chief," he called out to his now thoroughly uneasy horse, for he had captured the animal from the Sioux, after a duel in which he had killed his rider, the chief.

The horse at once became quiet, and Surgeon Powell stood awaiting the one who was coming.

"Coming back to get the horses he left here, as I supposed."

"Of course he must be one of the two men who were with that woman, and they captured our horses to stop further pursuit, yet why they did not kill Silent Sam I do not know."

"I'll give them credit, though, for they did most cleverly get the horses and tie up our guard, and I did not believe Si-

lent Sam could be trapped or caught napping."

Gazing fixedly out upon the plain, the piercing eyes of the Surgeon Scout now caught sight of a horse and rider.

They appeared in the darkness like spectres, but the Surgeon Scout knew that he had to deal with flesh and blood.

Nearer and nearer came the horse and rider, to suddenly halt close to the animal staked out a hundred feet from the timber.

The stranger seemed to be surprised, for the horse was turned up and down in part of the timber, as though looking for the other horses left there.

"He is searching for the others—ah! he is coming into the timber."

With this the Surgeon Scout nerved himself for what was to follow.

"I will not kill him, for if I can take him alive I may find out what I wish to know." And as the horse came within fifty feet of where the Surgeon Scout was standing in the timber, by the side of a large tree, he suddenly called out in commanding tones:

"Halt! and hands up, or I kill you!"

The revolver was leveled now, and the rider of the horse was covered.

But the response to the command of the Surgeon Scout was a surprise.

It came in an exclamation of alarm and in a woman's voice.

This at once disarmed Surgeon Powell of all intention to fire.

He would not fire upon a woman.

It must be the Woman in Black, who had rescued the two men lying in ambush.

But the woman, though startled into an exclamation of surprise and alarm, did not lose her presence of mind.

Following her cry came a word to her horse and sudden action—so sudden, in fact, that she had whirled about with great quickness and was off like an arrow from a bow before the Surgeon Scout could believe that he saw correctly.

"Halt, I say!"

"Halt! or take the consequences," shouted the Surgeon Scout, with no intention, however, of firing.

But a mock, though musical, burst of laughter came back in answer, and the woman took the consequences by continuing on in rapid flight.

"We'll catch her, Sioux, for you are king of them all in speed," cried Surgeon Powell, and a few bounds carried him to the side of his horse.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FATAL CHASE.

The run of the Surgeon Scout to the side of his horse startled the animal, but a word from his master quieted him.

His stake rope was quickly made into a bridle, and, barebacked as he was, the Surgeon Scout lost no time in mounting.

The woman had gained a start by this time of a good hundred yards, but that fact did not disturb the Surgeon Scout in the slightest.

He had never met a horse at the fort that could keep company with Sioux Chief in a run, and he had won many a bet on his speed.

He would soon overtake the fugitive. Again, he did not intend to fire upon her.

He would risk a fire from her and dash alongside.

That was his intention, and he settled himself down for a short and rapid run. Sioux Chief seemed to comprehend just what was expected of him, and he stretched himself out, for a race.

But after a short while the Surgeon Scout saw that he was not gaining.

"Come, Sioux Chief, limber up, old fellow," he said.

The way that Sioux Chief responded was most encouraging.

But still he was not gaining.

In fact, a few minutes more showed the Surgeon Scout that he was losing ground.

Could it be that the horse was lame?

No, he seemed to be running free and going like an arrow.

Still, that shadowy outline ahead grew less and less distinct.

"That horse is pulling away from you, Sioux Chief. Come, this will never do."

The Surgeon Scout watched for a moment, and then began to grow anxious as to the result.

He would try a shot.

"Halt, or I will bring your horse down with a rifle shot!"

The response was a burst of laughter that had a mocking ring in it.

"Halt, I say, and for the last time!"

The laughter was more mocking than before.

The shadowy form of horse and rider had grown more and more indistinct.

Then, for the first time since he had owned the horse, Surgeon Powell pressed the spurs into his flank.

Sioux Chief gave a wild snort of rage, of pain, of reproach commingled.

He did bound forward with still greater speed.

He fairly flew over the fainty soil.

But he did not appear to gain on that flying animal he was in pursuit of.

The chase had now kept up for a couple of miles or more.

Ahead loomed up a dark line.

It must be timber, perhaps the stream wound around in front again.

Once there, and the chase was lost to him, Surgeon Powell well knew.

There, too, the woman doubtless would find aid.

She had not fired upon him, and yet her comrades might not be so merciful.

He must catch her!

Sioux Chief must not acknowledge defeat!

With a determination to drive his horse to the very utmost, Surgeon Powell drove the spurs deep.

But with all this, the forms of horse and rider ahead did not draw nearer.

The horse the Surgeon Scout saw ahead must be a gray, if not white, and he did not seem driven, in spite of the exertions of Sioux Chief to his best speed.

At times he would make a spurt of speed, and then drop back.

But it seemed more the humor of his rider, for not once had Surgeon Powell heard a blow struck or a word urging him on.

"Now, Sioux Chief, one more grand struggle, and if useless, I'll give it up."

"If it was not a woman I'd try a shot."

The horse nobly responded, and seemed for a moment to be gaining.

It was a last, dying effort, for the noble beast gave a cry, as though of pain, swayed, staggered, a stream of blood burst from his wide-distended nostrils, and he went down head first upon the plain.

It was a fatal chase, for he had died doing his duty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

REVEALED BY THE FIRELIGHT.

Surgeon Powell felt that his horse was failing, that he had run his last race, and he prepared to draw him up to try and save him.

But in vain.

The end came quickly, and the rider had just time to catch himself, thus saving a severe fall for himself.

Agile as a panther, he caught on his feet, and quickly was by the side of his noble horse.

The animal gave a low moan, and the end had come.

"My poor, poor comrade," murmured the Surgeon Scout, and for a moment his own position, alone and dismounted, was forgotten, and the woman was not thought of.

Patting the horse affectionately upon the neck, Surgeon Powell arose and looked about him.

The woman had disappeared.

Strangest of all, there was no sound of hoof falls upon the plain.

Had she seen his horse go down, and had she drawn rein?

Had her horse also fallen?

Had she reached a different soil?

What did it mean, this silence?

Surely he could have distinctly heard

the sound of the hoofs if her horse was still in flight.

It was natural that Surgeon Powell should be on the alert.

He had only his revolvers, was dismounted and alone, far from help.

After listening for some minutes, and hearing no sound, he drew his revolver and moved on ahead.

If the woman's horse had also fallen, it would not be far away.

He walked one, two, three hundred yards, and knew that he was far beyond where she must have been when his horse went down.

He saw the dark line of timber ahead.

It must be all of half a mile away.

The woman had simply drawn rein when she saw the chase had ended, and was going slowly on to the timber.

Perhaps it was to bring her comrades back to turn the tables on him.

To have him, in his turn, be the one to fly.

"I have the advantage, dismounted as I am, for I can hear the coming of their horses long before they see me, and then hide," he said.

But he quickly made up his mind to retrace his way.

He knew that his comrades must have arrived in the timber by that time, and would be anxious about him.

So he set out at a brisk pace upon his return.

Coming upon his dead horse, he halted, tenderly rested his hand for a moment upon his head, and then took off the stake rope, and, coiling it, threw it over his shoulders.

Again he resumed his way, with a word of farewell called back to his horse.

He had gone about half a mile when he suddenly saw a glimmer of light far ahead.

He knew that his comrades had reached the camp and built a fire.

It was a beacon to guide him back over his way, so that he would go straight and not make any mistake.

On he went, still further, to suddenly halt.

As he did so, he dropped down upon the plain at full length.

He had made a discovery ahead of him.

It was an object that came between him and the distant firelight.

Was some one in his path, to catch him upon his return?

He distinctly saw the form of a horse revealed against the firelight.

Another moment, he beheld a human form, in relief against the firelight.

It was a slender form, clad in a riding habit, with slouch hat, and the momentary glance showed that it was the woman.

And more, she was pulling the saddle from the back of her horse.

What could it mean?

"It is that Woman in Black," muttered the Surgeon Scout.

Another moment and the woman and the horse moved out of the light.

The Surgeon Scout waited for some minutes before resuming his way.

Then he advanced with the greatest caution.

He had seen neither horse nor woman again.

Moving to the right, he looked to see if he could bring them into sight again.

He could not.

Moving to the left, he tried also to see if he could bring horse and rider between himself and the light of the fire.

He did so.

There was the horse, at least, and the animal appeared to be staked out.

But the woman was nowhere visible.

Advancing cautiously, the Surgeon Scout soon discovered the horse distinctly.

He was by the side of a large rock, and seemed to be tied to it.

But the woman was not visible.

Was she crouching behind the rock, lying in wait for him?

It would naturally be the case, and he began to circle around the rock, to see if he was right, drawing nearer and nearer as he did so.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOUNTED.

It was twice that the Surgeon Scout circled the rock completely, the second time much nearer to it than on the first.

He walked noiselessly, in a stooping posture, and kept his eyes riveted upon the rock.

He saw no movement close to it, to show that any one was hiding behind it.

The horse was certainly hitched to the rock, and it stood quietly.

But where was the rider?

If the horse had discovered him near, he made no sign of it that the Surgeon Scout could discover.

"I do not understand it a little bit. There is a horse, left there for some purpose, and apparently in my very grasp. But where is the rider?"

Again he encircled the horse and rock.

But he discovered nothing of the rider.

"That rider must be lying in wait to kill me. I will take the chances, for I will approach in the direction of coming from the camp. Can the woman think I was killed when my horse fell? Can she have supposed I gave up the chase and turned back? I cannot fathom it all.

"If she wanted to go on foot to reconnoitre the camp, when she saw the fire blaze up, why did she hitch her horse away out here on the plain, over a mile away?"

The more he thought it over the less he could get at the real facts of the case.

At last he had gotten around between the horse and the fire, and began to approach from that direction.

He went with great caution, crouching low, and revolver in hand.

As he drew nearer he was certain that the horse saw him.

The animal was not at all disturbed, however, at his approach.

Coming still nearer, the Surgeon Scout muttered:

"It is the gray horse, surely, that led poor Sioux Chief to his death. But where is his rider?"

As this question could not be answered, the Surgeon Scout crept on.

He was within twenty paces of the horse, yet could see no form crouching by the rock.

A moment more and he had reached the rock.

Quickly he crouched down in the shadow.

He was about to sever the rope that held the horse, when he saw that it had been curled around the rocks and tied.

He put his knife back in its scabbard and felt for the knot.

His hand came upon a slip of paper.

It was tied in the knot.

"Ah! a communication, I take it. This but adds to the mystery, and I'll keep it until I reach camp, if I am allowed to get there, for, good as my eyes are, they are not capable of reading in the dark."

He put the paper carefully away in his pocket, untied the stake rope from about the rock, and suddenly bounded upon the back of the horse.

The animal showed no ill will at a change of riders.

That it was the gray that the woman had ridden Surgeon Powell felt certain, for the horse was warm from a hard run.

He had on no bridle or saddle, only the stake rope that held him to the rock.

Surgeon Powell was confidently expecting a shot from off on the plain as he rode off.

But none came.

Then the slip of paper tied in the knot of the stake rope reassured him.

He was sure that the horse had been left there, for him to run upon, on his return afoot to his camp, or—it had been left there for some one else.

The slip of paper would show.

Having gotten well away from the rock, Surgeon Powell put the horse into a canter, and rode on to the camp.

The movement of the animal was easy in the extreme, and without effort.

A ride of a few miles brought him to the camp, where he found Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SLIP OF PAPER.

It was with a sigh of great relief that both Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill welcomed the return of Surgeon Powell.

It put their minds at rest on his account, though they were sure, as he came back upon another horse, that he had gone through some tragic scene.

He was back again, however, and apparently all right, and the three would now have to contend with the fact that the horses were missing, and with them Silent Sam and the redskin.

"Well, pards, how goes it in camp?" asked Surgeon Powell, as he dismounted near Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill.

"With Bill and myself all is right, Frank, and glad are we to see you back in safety; but the pack horses are gone, and Silent Sam and the Man Killer, we hope, are after them, though we do not just know," answered Buffalo Bill.

"The pack horses gone?" asked Surgeon Powell, with surprise.

"Yes, and the horses of Silent Sam and the Indian."

"But how and where?"

"That we do not know; only wish we did. The truth is, Frank, this has been a night of surprises, even worse, for when I left you and went back to the camp, we found the Indian there with a lariat about his neck, and half choked to death, and all he can tell about it is that some one surprised him, lassoed him, and yet who it was he did not even see."

"Very strange."

"Then, when we brought him round and came here, we found you gone, and the trapper and Man Killer were left to keep camp, while Wild Bill and I rode off in search of you."

"I was all right."

"Yes, but that we did not know, and we had sense enough to return to camp to await the coming of day, and what should we find but the horses missing, and those two queer pards of yours gone."

"What do you think happened?"

"Don't know. Suppose the horses were stampeded by the mysterious foes who seem to be trailing us, instead of our tracking them, and the redskin and trapper have gone after them, for the outfit is all here."

"Unless they got scared at being surprised, and lit out for the fort," said Wild Bill.

"They would not do that, and if they did they would have taken only their own horses."

"Yes."

"Are their bridles and saddles here, Cody?"

"Yes, and our outfit complete, and theirs."

"Then they are after the horses, for my idea is that they are not men to desert us, or shrink from any danger."

"It is too dark to trail them yet, so we will have to wait until light dawns."

"Yes, and meanwhile you can tell us, Frank, about yourself, for we notice that you have a different horse, and judge that you have not had a most cheerful time, taken altogether."

"I have not, as you will say when I tell you of my very strange adventure."

"Let us have it."

"Who do you think I have been in chase of?"

"Did you do any shooting?"

"No."

"Then it was that Woman in Black."

"Exactly, Bill Cody, for you always have a very clever way of guessing facts."

"We heard no shots, and if you have been on a chase, and did not fire, it must have been the woman. But that is not her horse, for she rode a jet-black animal when we saw her."

"True, but she rode this gray animal to-night, as I happen to know, and he is the fleetest thing in the way of horse-flesh I know."

"He's a beauty, long bodied, clean limbed, and looks like a runner and stayer; but he'd drop back if he had a

go with Comrade there," and Buffalo Bill pointed to his splendid horse, feeding near.

"My dear Cody, I held the same opinion of my noble horse, Sioux Chief, when I started in pursuit of this gray."

"I had no bridle, saddle, rifle, or traps to weight Sioux Chief down, and yet this gray dropped him at will."

"You don't mean it, doc."

"I do, indeed."

"But where is the woman?"

"I'll tell you."

With this Surgeon Powell told his story, just as it had occurred, and he was most attentively listened to, the two Scouts glancing again and again at the iron gray, as his splendid speed was spoken of.

They both expressed deepest sympathy for Sioux Chief's fate, and then the Surgeon Scout, stepping nearer to the fire, took out the slip of paper he had taken from the knot in the lariat.

"Now we'll see what this is," he said.

Written in pencil, and in a hand that was feminine, but scrawling, as though the words had been traced in the dark, Surgeon Powell saw and read as follows:

"Death is the certain doom of all who follow me."

"My trail leads but to the grave."

"Go back while you may."

"THE WOMAN IN BLACK."

CHAPTER XXVI.

PROPHETIC WORDS.

Surgeon Powell had read aloud what was written on the slip of paper. Then he glanced up at the faces of his two companions.

"Well, pards, what do you think of that?"

"Simply that she is determined not to be tracked in the devilry she has undertaken," answered Buffalo Bill.

"Then you think she is on some trail of evil?"

"What else, Frank, when she is an unknown woman here on the frontier? And she surely is with a band of outlaws, for you know what we told you of the strange woman in the country further north."

"They must be one and the same."

"Oh, yes, for you could not find two such women even on this frontier."

"I guess her trail will be a fatal one in the end, but for those with her," said Wild Bill, in his quiet way.

"Yes, she simply interests me in her the more."

"But why did she leave me that horse in place of mine, for I am sure that she did so?"

"The ways of all women are beyond finding out, and especially one such as she is," said Buffalo Bill, with the air of one who had had experience to speak from.

"I, for one, will go to the end of her trail, in spite of the doom she threatens."

"Yes, Frank, and I am with you."

"I'll make a third," added Wild Bill.

Then the fact that thus far those they were trailing had not done any real harm to them, though they had bound both Silent Sam and the Indian, was discussed.

"They are like the Mormons in the war with the United States, when General Johnson attacked them. They would not fire on the troops, but ran off their mules, stampeded cattle, and cut out wagon trains, intending to win not by battle and killing, but by destroying the supplies of their foes."

"So far not a shot has been fired at us, and yet we have been made to suffer."

"Yes, and have had no chance to hit back," said Wild Bill.

"Well, we will get breakfast now, pards, and by that time it will be light enough to take the trail of the horses, and two of us can go after them, while one remains to guard the camp."

This suggestion of Surgeon Powell was followed, and by the time the first glimmer of light came Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill mounted their horses and took the trail of the four missing animals, and

which was readily followed up the bank of the stream.

"Well, Bill, it seems that this is a game of our being hunted, instead of hunting others," said Buffalo Bill, as he rode away with his companion scout, leaving Surgeon Powell to guard the camp.

"It not only looks that way, but is that way, pard."

"It's interesting to me, as it's a new sensation," answered Wild Bill.

"I cannot believe that Silent Sam and Man Killer have deserted us, and Doc Powell seems to feel the same way, though I believe you doubt them."

"I do, a little bit."

"Fact is, Bill, my life has been such that I trust few men, especially one with a redskin, and another who, though a paleface, does not say who and what he is."

"If we find those two fellows, I'll acknowledge I am wrong; but you see a white man who is hiding out here, under an assumed name, and a redskin who talks several different languages and belongs to no tribe, are men to keep your eyes on."

"Circumstances may have driven Silent Sam from his home, and he may not be in the wrong, while that redskin may have lost caste with his people by befriending the palefaces."

"But have you thought any upon this mysterious killing of black soldiers at Fort Benham?"

"Only enough to know that it's a case of revenge for some deed the black soldiers have been guilty of, and an avenger generally knows just the man he is gunning for."

"Yes, the black troops may have attacked and wiped out some Indian village, and the braves who survived be the ones who are trying to avenge the wrong upon them by shooting colored soldiers only."

"I guess they'd have plenty laid up against white soldiers, as well, from the same reason, Cody."

"Yes, too much, indeed."

"But, then, civilization must advance, and the army clear the way, so that a stern duty demands cruel measures against a cruel foe."

"I pity the Indians, yes; and yet my duty demands that I must protect the pioneer and myself from their hatred and barbarous warfare."

"Some day the Indians will be wiped out, or forced into civilization, and then their wrongs will be smoothed over in history, and they will be regarded as only a race of romance, as the Aztecs of Mexico are looked upon to-day."

"Yes, Bill, the Indians of this Western world are doomed, and it is a question, in my mind, if the red races the world over, the Turks, Egyptians, Hindoos, Chinese, and Japanese, are not also doomed to merge into the mighty white races, while the blacks, from amalgamation, will gradually do the same."

"In spite of the old Biblical legend of Shem, Ham, and Japhet, the paleface will one day be the only inhabitant of this world, whatever may be the characteristics of the people of Heaven and Hades."

"Say, Bill Cody?"

"Yes, pard."

"You mistook your calling, for you ought to be on the platform, teaching the multitudes, not on horseback, trailing redskins."

Buffalo Bill laughed, and then replied, thoughtfully:

"Perhaps I may be some day different from what I now am, for I have an ambition to make a name in the world."

And later events have shown that the army scout spoke with the vision of prophecy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A WARNING UNHEEDED.

A ride of half a dozen miles up the banks of the stream had the two scouts gone, both silent after Buffalo Bill's dissertation upon the coming doom of the red races.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill halted, his companion doing the same.

Listening attentively for a moment, Buffalo Bill said:

"Hear them?"

"Yes."

"I hope that our two pards are coming with the horses?"

"So do I. But let us be ready, should it be foes that are coming."

They rode to a fallen tree on the edge of the bank, and where both their horses and themselves were fairly well protected.

The sound of coming hoofs grew louder, and soon there came into sight through the timber Silent Sam and the Indian.

They were mounted upon their own horses, and were leading the two pack animals.

"I'll give it up, Cody. They are all right; only, how did they come to let the horses get away?" said Wild Bill.

"We will ask them," and Buffalo Bill rode out of shelter into the trail.

Silent Sam and Man Killer halted suddenly, dreading a foe, apparently.

But seeing who it was, they came on again at a gallop.

"Ho, pards, we were on your trail, and I am glad to see that you got the horses."

"How did they get away from the camp?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Don't know. The chief and myself were not far away, but suddenly heard the horses go off at a run."

"We followed on foot, and found them staked out a few miles back on the trail."

Silent Sam appeared to feel tired after his long explanation, and was silent.

The Indian had not spoken.

"Some one cut them out from the camp?"

Silent Sam nodded.

"How did you follow in the darkness?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Guessed at it."

"And the horses were staked out?"

"Yes."

"Were there any other trails?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"One."

"We noticed that there were the tracks of five horses."

"It was the man who ran off our horses that rode the one that left the fifth track."

"Yes."

"Well, we are all right again, and can push on after that woman and her two pards, who have given us a night full of trouble."

"Hope we'll catch them," said Man Killer.

"We'll do it," said Silent Sam, and Wild Bill muttered:

"Guess I was wrong—they don't scare a little bit."

"Where is Big Medicine Man?" asked the redskin.

Buffalo Bill told what had happened to the Surgeon Scout, even to the slip of paper and what was on it.

Both Silent Sam and Man Killer were interested, in spite of their seeming indifference, and the latter said, again:

"Must catch white squaw with iron hand."

A rapid gallop brought the party to the camp, and Surgeon Powell was found on guard, and reported having seen no one.

The trapper and Indian had to have breakfast, so the horses were all staked out to rest and feed, after which a start would be made, and once more upon the trail they were following the day before.

A halt of an hour was enough, and then the start was again made, Surgeon Powell leading the way to the spot where his horse had fallen dead the night before.

From there the trail of the mysterious woman must be picked up.

All seemed bothered at one thing, and that was the fact of the woman's being mounted upon a gray horse at night, when the day before she had been seen on a black animal.

Then, too, the men who were her comrades had been mounted upon bay horses when seen by day.

Where, then, had the gray horse come from?

His presence was proof that the woman had received reinforcements from somewhere.

This could only be determined when they should pick up the trail again and follow it to the end.

The warning of what their fate would be to follow her trail had not the slightest effect upon those five men, as far as they were willing to let it be known.

So, straight on the trail to where Surgeon Powell had been dismounted the night before he led the way.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PICKING UP A TRAIL.

There were trails visible, but indistinctly, upon the plain.

There were the tracks of the iron gray, when he was ridden up near the camp by the woman, and then away in his flight.

There were the tracks of Sioux Chief in his noble and last race after the gray and the Woman in Black.

Afar off was seen a number of dark objects, which all knew to be coyotes.

Of course, they were gathered about the body of the Surgeon Scout's dead horse.

"I wish it were possible to bury him, for most faithfully has he served me," said Surgeon Powell.

But in that hard soil it was impossible.

The iron gray, seen in the daylight, was a superb-looking animal.

He went along as though he did not feel the Surgeon Scout's nearly two hundred pounds, and was satisfied with the change of riders.

The snarling gang of coyotes scattered at the approach of the party, and Surgeon Powell's face was stern set as he rode by the torn carcass of his one true equine comrade.

Beyond the trail of the gray was taken up, indistinctly left in the hard ground, and it was followed for a few hundred yards, and there had halted.

"If the gray could only tell us," said Surgeon Powell.

"If he acted square, he wouldn't tell on a woman," Buffalo Bill responded, and then added:

"But others met the woman here, for here are the tracks of three other horses."

"You are right, Bill, and the gray's trail goes alone back over the plain, by a flank movement, see, to where he was left for me."

"Yes, and after leaving him, the woman came back on foot to this point, and met those who were awaiting her."

"But now to take this trail and follow it, for there are not enough to make it dangerous for us yet awhile, though one must be careful when night comes, or we may be again bested."

"I'll stand guard this night," Wild Bill said.

"No, let the Indian go on watch until midnight, and Silent Sam watch him from cover, and two of us can take the rest of the night," suggested Buffalo Bill, and this was considered the best to be done.

The trail they now took up was made by three horses on the way from the timber, the tracks showing that they were the same that were followed the day before, and made by the horse of the Woman in Black and the animals ridden by her companions.

The track of the gray horse, now ridden by Surgeon Powell, was not there, but soon after Buffalo Bill found it alone, and leading toward the camp of the scouts.

This showed the party that the fugitives had gone on to the timber ahead, camped there, evidently, at least for a short while, and, from the woman having found a change of horses, they had doubtless met others, who awaited them there.

How many had been met would be discovered upon finding the camp of the fugitives in the timber, now but a short distance ahead.

Silent Sam, who knew the country well, said that the timber was very thick, extended for miles back to the foothills of a large range, and there was a small stream there, fed by springs, and the camp of the fugitives would doubtless be near.

He further said that the stage trail to Fort Benham ran over along the base of the foothills, some thirty miles distant, and what outlaws there were in the country about the fort were reputed to have their retreat up in the range, too close to the Indian village for soldiers to pursue them.

Buffalo Bill listened to what Silent Sam said, in answer to questions from Doctor Powell, and remarked:

"Well, three of us, at least, do not know this country, well, for you, Frank, have not been long enough at the fort to get acquainted; but Silent Sam does know it, and so does the Man Killer, I take it, and we will have to rely much upon them for guidance, though it will not take me long to get an idea of the lay of the land."

As they neared the timber, they separated, extending into a line, each man well apart from the other, so as to avoid a fire in group, should foes be lurking in ambush.

But the timber was reached, and, entering it, a ride of a quarter of a mile brought them to an abrupt ridge, from which flowed several springs, forming a small stream.

Here was a fire still burning, and this had been the camp of the fugitives.

Buffalo Bill at once made a search for signs, while dinner was being prepared, and just as the meal was ready he came up and joined the others, with the remark:

"I have discovered the tracks of just seven horses here, one of them being your iron gray, doctor, three of them the animals we tracked yesterday, and there were three more, one of them, I feel sure, being a large mule, but shod."

"Leaving the iron gray out, and the mule for a pack animal, it would make five horses with riders, and one of these riders we know to be a woman."

"That is a clear statement, Cody, of what we may have to face, and it took you to read the signs exactly as I believe we will find them."

"Thus far we have found the woman and her companions not inclined to kill, but anxious to force us off their trail; but what may follow, now that we have disregarded their warning, we can only guess at."

"As for me, I say go on, for in some way I will connect those we are after with the slayer of the black soldiers, and we are five to five, and have nothing to fear, though thus far we have found our foes a trifle too clever for us," said Surgeon Powell.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CATCHING UP.

Having expressed himself as he had, Surgeon Powell glanced at his companions, to see what their opinion was.

"You know me well enough, Frank, to feel sure I am with you in all you propose," said Buffalo Bill, in answer to the words of the Surgeon Scout.

"I'm in this affair to stay, if it's a grave I have to end in," said Wild Bill.

The three then looked toward the Indian and Silent Sam.

They were anxious to know just what these two wanted to do.

Neither spoke, and neither seemed to feel they were expected to do so.

At last, as the silence was becoming painful, Surgeon Powell said:

"Well, Silent Sam, what do you say?"

"Nothing."

"You surely have an opinion?"

"No, I haven't."

"Why not?"

"You wanted me to come?"

"Yes."

"I came."

"Yes."

"You are chief?"

"Well, yes."

"Then I haven't a right to say."

"But I ask you to do so."

"Give your orders. I'll obey."

That settled it as far as Silent Sam was concerned, and Wild Bill muttered to his fellow-scout:

"That fellow gets me every time. I don't know him a little bit, Bill."

"I find him a study, but an interesting one," was Buffalo Bill's reply.

"Now, Man Killer, it is your turn?" and Surgeon Powell turned his piercing eyes full upon the immovable face of the Indian.

"Chief talk, brave keep still tongue," was the laconic response.

"But the Chief White Beaver asks the Chief Man Killer to talk."

"Big Chief say go. Man Killer go."

"That settles it then; we go, and all appear of the same mind."

"I hate to have even one along who is not heart and soul in the work on hand."

"Come, we'll mount now and be off, and Silent Sam, you take the lead as guide, though we will, of course, follow the trail our foes left."

The horses were saddled up at once, on this order from Doctor Powell, and in a short while the party was again on the move, Silent Sam being ahead a couple of hundred yards.

The trail was a broad one, and when some soft ground was reached, the tracks which Buffalo Bill had said had been made by a mule were seen, and all asserted that the scout was right.

It was a surprise to the surgeon and two scouts, as they went along, mile after mile, to see that no effort had been made by the pursued to cover up their trail.

In fact, as the day wore away the tracks seemed to be fresher, showing that the pursuers were gaining.

A camp was passed, where the fire was still burning, and this had been the halting place, doubtless, of the fugitives after leaving the timber where they had met the others.

There was no water near the camp, but Silent Sam said the little river they had camped on the night before was only a dozen miles ahead.

"It certainly appears as though they thought the warning would scare us off, and they did not expect us to pursue further," said Surgeon Powell.

"They will discover that they have made a mistake," Wild Bill remarked.

"It is certain that we are much nearer to them now, than when we started this morning, and yet we have kept only a steady gait," Buffalo Bill asserted, and he had been most carefully examining the trail.

"Perhaps we'll find them encamped on the river ahead," said Surgeon Powell, and, anxious to get there before night-fall, he called to Silent Sam to quicken his pace.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE NIGHT WATCH.

The sun was almost upon the distant horizon, when Silent Sam called back:

"River yonder!"

He might have spared his breath in this instance, for the well-trained border-men had long known from the appearances about them that water was near.

All pressed through the timber ahead, as they approached the stream through a narrow swale, for some sign of a camp.

They had hoped to come upon their foes encamped upon the river bank, and surprise them.

They would rather have done so in daylight, instead of then, as darkness was close at hand; but if the camp was discovered, they would take all chances of making the best of it.

But the banks of the river were reached, and no one was visible.

Yet there was a camp, or the remains of one.

The fire was yet in a blaze, and the pursued party had not been gone over a couple of hours, at the best.

It was too late to push on further, for Silent Sam said the ford, half a mile away, was a dangerous one, the stream running swift and among rocks, so a camp must be made, especially as the trail could not be followed by night.

If the pursued pushed on through the night, it would leave the pursuers well behind at the start in the morning.

Still, it could not be helped, and Surgeon Powell called a halt for the night.

There was a place to water the horses near, grass grew in abundance, and wood was at hand, while the camping place was easily guarded.

If the pursued had pushed on across the river, as appeared to be the case, there was no dread of a surprise for them that night.

Still, Buffalo Bill rode on along their trail up to the ford, and saw that it led into the stream and came out on the other shore.

He saw that Silent Sam was right in saying the ford was a dangerous one, for, without a guide he did not care to risk his horse.

He was anxious, however, to see the trail of the fugitives on the other shore.

To do this he must go across, and there was yet light enough for him to see all that he wished to.

Throwing off his clothes, he plunged in, and, a bold swimmer, he picked out the way to bring a horse across, though he had no intention of then doing so.

"I wish to give Silent Sam a surprise," he muttered.

Reaching the other shore, he saw the trail coming out.

Carefully he examined, and, counting the hoof marks, saw that all were there, including the mule.

He returned then, picking his way, and noting just how to ride a horse across and not have him lose his footing, for the stream was a trifle over girth deep in the right crossing, and a horse, by a false step to right or left, might go far beyond his depth, and be swept upon the rapids below.

Resuming his clothes, Buffalo Bill mounted and returned to the camp, just as supper was announced by Silent Sam, who had proven himself a most excellent cook, and seemed anxious to do the work.

"Well, Bill, did you make any discovery?" asked Surgeon Powell, as Buffalo Bill, having staked out his horse in a good feeding spot, came up and joined the others about the fire.

"They crossed the ford, doc, and as Silent Sam said, it looks like a very dangerous one, and sure death for one crossing it without a guide, I should say."

"Yes, soldiers and Indians, too, have been drowned there, and many horses, too," said Silent Sam.

"Yes, I have heard of it, and the fort scouts and soldiers dread it—the Indians call it Death Waters," said Surgeon Powell.

After a good supper, pipes were lighted, and then the Surgeon Scout suggested that the night watch be set and the rest turn in.

"You go on watch, Man Killer, and move between the horses and the camp, and Silent Sam, you take up a good position to keep your eye on him, should he get into trouble."

"Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill have said they will relieve you at midnight, so take my watch, Silent Sam, and call them promptly."

"Yes."

The Indian and Silent Sam then moved to their respective positions, and after a round of the camp, and the horses, Surgeon Powell went back to where Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill had spread their blankets, and said, as he also turned in:

"Well, we have a double night watch, pards, and I guess will not be disturbed to-night, as the fugitives do not seem to think we are following them, and have put the river between us."

"We will be able to tell better when

to-morrow comes," sleepily said Buffalo Bill, and in a minute he was asleep, and the others quickly followed his example.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MIDNIGHT VISITORS.

Buffalo Bill was too experienced a plainsman to slumber quietly when something was going wrong about the camp.

He had the same instinct as a faithful watchdog, to sniff danger in the air.

With confidence in the ability of the Indian to watch the camp, and of Silent Sam to watch the Indian, Buffalo Bill was yet uneasy.

He at first sank into a sound and restful sleep.

But after several hours he awoke suddenly.

Just why he could not tell.

He tried to banish the thought of danger, but could not.

Had it been Surgeon Powell or Wild Bill on watch, he would at once spring up and go to satisfy himself that all was well.

But he did not wish the Indian or Silent Sam to feel the slightest suspicion that they would neglect their duty as sentinels.

His prowling about would certainly cause them to dread that he had a fear of their not doing their duty.

Again he sank to sleep.

But his dreams were troubled.

At last he sat up, took out his watch, and by the light of the flickering camp-fire looked at the time.

It was one o'clock.

He feared that he was mistaken in the dim light.

He looked again. One o'clock said the hands of the watch.

Why had he and Wild Bill not been called by Silent Sam at twelve?

Or had Wild Bill been called, and thought he could stand guard alone, and so had let him sleep?

No, there lay the form of Wild Bill not twenty feet away.

There also was Surgeon Powell near.

Both were apparently fast asleep.

Buffalo Bill now arose quietly, buckled on his belt of arms, drew on his boots, and softly crept to the fire.

He was right. It was now ten minutes after one o'clock.

Quickly the scout strode to where he had seen Silent Sam take his position, about half way between the camp and the horses.

There was a group of rocks, and as he approached them Buffalo Bill called out: "Silent Sam!"

A low moan greeted him in answer.

Springing forward, Buffalo Bill discovered Silent Sam lying on the ground, and, running his hands over him, he found him to be bound hand and foot, and a gag was in his mouth.

At once the voice of the scout rang out in alarm:

"Ho, pards! we have been tricked again!"

It took but a sound to awaken Surgeon Powell and Wild Bill.

Then they heard:

"Silent Sam has been gagged and bound—here by these rocks and big tree. I go to find the redskin!"

Surgeon Powell and Wild Bill quickly drew on their boots, buckled on their arms, and ran to the place designated by Buffalo Bill.

There they found Silent Sam, still bound, as described.

As they set to work to free him, they again heard Buffalo Bill's voice, a hundred yards away.

"The Indian is here, just as Silent Sam, and the horses are gone!"

This was certainly a surprise.

It was carrying the war into their own camp with a vengeance.

Leaving Wild Bill to free Silent Sam of his gag and bonds, Surgeon Powell ran to where Buffalo Bill was.

The horses were surely gone.

But the Indian was lying on the ground near a clump of cedars, and Buffalo Bill

was quickly unwinding the lasso curled about him from head to foot, the noose being about his neck, for he had evidently been lassoed from behind.

The gag had been taken from his mouth by the scout, but the Indian could not yet speak.

Both Silent Sam and himself had evidently been prisoners for some time.

CHAPTER XXXII.

UNSEEN.

There was no doubt but that the horses were gone.

But where?

Their stake ropes were gone with them.

The Man Killer was aided to his feet by Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell, and helped to the fire, where Wild Bill had already taken Silent Sam, and given him a canteen of water to soothe his parched and inflamed mouth.

Throwing some wood on the fire, it flared up brightly as Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill came up with the Indian.

The faces of the three pards were white and stern.

They could not but feel that they were being beaten at their own game of clever strategy toward a foe.

The Indian was given a canteen of water and drank freely.

Then Surgeon Powell said:

"Pards, this is getting a little monotonous."

Neither Silent Sam nor the Indian spoke, though the surgeon's eyes were turned upon them.

"How was it, Silent Sam, for, as our midnight visitors did not deprive you wholly of breath, use what they left you by talking freely."

"I don't know."

"You don't know who surprised you on your post of duty and gagged and tied you?"

"No."

"Tell me what you do know."

"There!"

The man put his hand to the back of his head, and when he withdrew it, there was a red stain upon it.

"Ah! you have been dealt a blow from behind. Let me see it!"

The Surgeon Scout looked at the trapper's head, washed the blood away with water from the canteen, and exposed a gash in the scalp a couple of inches in length and cut to the bone.

"This was made by some sharp instrument, for it has left a clean cut. It was dealt from behind, and you were stunned, so knew nothing?"

Silent Sam nodded, and Surgeon Powell quickly took a few stitches in the wound and dressed it.

Then the trapper said:

"I was leaning against the tree, having just come from where Man Killer was, near the horses."

"I felt the blow, and that is all I know."

"It is a clever fellow, indeed, who can creep up behind you without your hearing him, and he took big chances."

"Maybe he was in the tree," suggested Buffalo Bill.

"That might be. Now, Man Killer, what can you tell us?" and Surgeon Powell turned to the Indian.

The redskin stood up, took the lariat that had been around his neck and body, and crept, without the slightest sound, up to within a dozen feet of Silent Sam, who stood at the fire, with his back to him, apparently not knowing what Man Killer's intention was.

He had not spoken, was acting in pantomime, and the Surgeon Scout and his two comrades watched him attentively.

Suddenly the coil was thrown, the noose caught about Silent Sam's neck, and he was dragged backward and downward to the ground, while with a bound the Indian placed his foot upon the rope, which he drew taut, and thrust a revolver into the trapper's face.

Had Silent Sam wished to resist he was caught so thoroughly off his guard that he could not do so, and Surgeon Powell,

seeing that the pantomime was far too real, sprang forward and cried:

"Hold, chief! You will hurt the trapper!"

The Indian desisted at once, while Silent Sam got upon his feet quickly, his hand upon his revolver.

But his anger cooled in an instant, and he grunted:

"Don't play with me, redskin."

The Indian had not yet spoken, but innocently asked:

"Paleface pards see?"

"Oh, yes, you illustrated it a trifle too well, at least for Silent Sam," Buffalo Bill said, suppressing a laugh at the act of the Indian.

"Well, I understand how it was done, and I conclude that if Silent Sam was where he could see you, Man Killer, the two attacks were made at the same instant on both of you."

"Yes, Frank, and it will go to prove that there was more than one in this attack."

"Sure, Pard Bill," assured Wild Bill.

"Well, the question is now as to whether our horses have been run off beyond our reach, or have been taken a certain distance and left, as before, only to retard our pursuit," Buffalo Bill remarked.

"We will know in the morning, and we can do nothing until then, so turn in, all of you, and get what sleep you can while I stand guard."

"No, doc, I'll take the watch," said Buffalo Bill.

"You and Wild Bill can take it tomorrow night—if we get our horses back," replied Surgeon Powell, and the others at once turned in, and were soon fast asleep.

Surgeon Powell moved about the camp, around it, and kept a bright watch.

But the day began to dawn without anything happening to disturb the sleepers until called by their leader.

The attacks seemed to be made only on the trapper and Indian, and for the purpose only of running off the horses.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE BACK TRACK.

Breakfast was over with, and Silent Sam was told to keep the camp, the Indian to go with Surgeon Powell and Wild Bill on the trail of the horses, while Buffalo Bill was to scout about the neighborhood of the ford and see what he could discover.

It was just light enough to pick up the trail when the party started, and Buffalo Bill went on toward the ford.

The trail of the horses was easily followed by the trackers, and led back toward the fort.

There was discovered to be the track of one more horse than those belonging to the party, and it joined them not far from the camp.

"From my remembrance of the hoof mark of that black horse ridden by that strange woman, I say that this is his track," said Doctor Powell.

"Same track. Squaw with iron hand came again last night," assented the Indian.

Wild Bill also asserted that it was the track of the black horse, and, furthermore, showed that it came from the direction of the ford.

"Then she was alone, unless the others came on foot."

"Yes, doctor, it looks so."

"And a woman came into our camp, with two guards on duty, Wild Bill, and bound and gagged them both."

"That's what she did do."

"It seems incredible."

"It does."

"I cannot understand it."

"Know all if the white squaw get grip on throat," said the Indian.

"It shall be my desire to keep her grip off of my throat, Man Killer."

"Me kill her some time."

"Oh, no, not a woman."

"She have scalp, same as white brave."

"That is not the way to reason, chief."

You must not harm that woman under any circumstances."

"Chief hear."

"And you must heed."

The Indian nodded, and the three continued on the trail of the horses at a brisk walk.

Presently the Surgeon Scout halted.

"What is it, Pard Doc?"

"See that track?"

"Yes, it is going back."

"Yes."

"She had left the horses and turned back."

The Indian had made the same discovery, that the track of the black horse, if that animal had made them, had doubled and come back over the trail.

It was seen to branch off from the main trail just where it had been discovered, and it evidently led to the ford, not returning by the camp.

The other tracks led on as before, and the signs showed that the horses had been in a canter, and evidently were led, as they were close together.

After a tramp of half a dozen miles, the trail turned suddenly to the left, and in a little vale the horses were found.

They were staked out upon a little meadowland, very sparsely overgrown with grass, and which the kidnapped animals evidently knew of.

"It is strange that the one who stole our horses should show the humanity to care for them by placing them here where they could get food, and not stake them out upon the open plain, which was devoid of grass," said Surgeon Powell.

"It's a queer affair all around, doc, for the horses were not really stolen, only led away to retard our pursuit for half a day."

"Yes, and that when we thought those we were in pursuit of were sure we had heeded the warning and turned back."

"It's mighty mysterious all around, doc; but there is your gray, so the Woman of the Iron Hand did not take back her horse."

"I am glad that she did not, for it would have forced me upon one of the pack animals, and put extra weight upon all of our horses to distribute the outfit evenly."

They had now come to the horses, the animals regarding them curiously, and welcoming their approach with a neigh.

"If you only had the power to speak, what a story you could tell us, good horses," said Surgeon Powell.

"Pony see, hear, make war cry, but no talk," said the Indian.

"I only wish they could. It would have been a boss way of making a horse, if the Lord had only thought about it, which I guess He didn't, seeing as they don't talk," said Wild Bill.

Surgeon Powell laughed at the scout's queer conceit, and replied:

"Well, we will have to wait our chance to learn what they know, Bill. But come, we'll get back to camp, have a rest and dinner, and then push on across the river and see what to-night has in store for us."

"Yes, and see what Buffalo Bill has found out, for whenever he goes on a lone trail he strikes it rich nine times out of ten."

"I believe you are right," answered the Surgeon Scout, and, leaping upon the back of the bareback gray, he led the way back to camp.

Upon their arrival there, Silent Sam said Buffalo Bill had not returned.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BUFFALO BILL'S FIND.

When Buffalo Bill went off alone on his trail of discovery, he came upon the tracks of a single horse, leading down from the ford to the camp.

"That is the track of the black horse ridden by that strange woman," he muttered.

He examined it closely, and came to the conclusion to follow it.

It led him to a point several hundred yards from the camp.

There the animal had been left stand-

ing, evidently unhitched, for there was nothing near to tie to, and no sign of a stake in the ground.

"Could she have alone caught and handled both the Indian and Silent Sam?" he muttered.

Continuing his musing, he said:

"Once Silent Sam got a good blow on the head, and last night it was a cut, while the Indian has each time been simply choked.

"If it is the woman does it, she evidently does not care to hurt us seriously, merely to scare us off the trail.

"As for me, she only makes me that more determined to pursue it, and if I mistake not, Doc and Wild Bill feel the same way, while that queer fellow, Silent Sam, and the Indian are getting a little revengeful, I take it, toward their unseen foe, but the woman it must be.

"Now to see where this trail leads from here."

The scout was not long in discovering that the trail led to those of the other horses coming from the camp.

Satisfied on this point, and knowing that the others would see where the trail went, Buffalo Bill turned back to the ford the way he had started.

Before searching there he came upon the tracks of the black horse going back.

The animal's rider had accomplished the work started upon and was returning.

The approach to the ford was dotted with large boulders scattered about, and there were large pines and small clusters of cedars.

Picking his way, the scout gained the same place on the bank he had reached the evening before.

He could see the tracks of deer, elk, bear, and other animals leading to the water, where they had gone to drink, but to one side were the hoof marks of the black horse, where he had come out of the stream, and again entered it, in the night.

"That is a plucky woman, indeed, to attempt this ford at night; but she did it, that is certain, unless it was a man mounted upon her black horse, and which I am half inclined to believe, for I can hardly think a woman could do what she has done.

"Still, she certainly was the one to lasso the Indian in the canyon, and tie him unaided.

"I see no other hoof print, so she must have crossed alone.

"But where are her two comrades the while, I wonder?

"It's all harder and harder to understand."

The scout now stood in a quandary as to just what to do.

He was tempted to cross the ford, as he had done the evening before, yet could see really nothing to be gained by it.

"I'll just sit down here in this cedar bunch and think it over," mused the scout; and he suited his action to his words.

The scout's thoughts turned upon his having decided to go to Fort Benham to visit his old friend, Surgeon Frank Powell, and how his equally as tried pard, Wild Bill, told him how he had been put upon a special duty, to try and find out who the mysterious girl outlaw of the stage trails was, and where were her haunts, who her allies.

"Then we chlp in on the work together, Wild Bill, for she has left these parts, as I have discovered, and is supposed to have gone down toward Fort Benham, where I am going to visit Doc Powell."

"Then it's a go, Bill, for I was going to ask your help.

"I am with you."

So was the compact made, a letter was sent to Surgeon Powell telling of their coming, and the two pards started, to be saved from an ambush from two men who were the comrades of the very woman they were on the track of, and to be saved, too, by the very pard they were going to visit.

Now the situation was, ran the thoughts of Buffalo Bill, that they were being hunted, as it were, by the very one they wished to find.

That five of them were being most cleverly outwitted by the woman and her two comrades, at least thus far on the trail they were.

While lost in thought, and hidden among the cedars, Buffalo Bill unconsciously turned his eyes up the river, and beheld a horseman coming down the bank.

He did not know him, and, from appearances, supposed him to be one of the comrades of the woman.

"If we can't get pudding, we must take pie," he muttered, as he brought his rifle around for use, for the man must come within a couple of hundred feet of where he was in hiding.

CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT BUFFALO BILL SAW.

Buffalo Bill was ready for his man, whoever he might be.

He saw that he was well mounted and equipped.

The outfit on the horse showed that the rider was prepared for a long trail, but the good beast did not seem to mind the weight, though his master was a man fully six feet in height and well built.

He wore no beard, but a heavy mustache shaded his mouth, and his face was handsome, though very darkly bronzed by exposure, while his hair was of golden hue and hung heavily upon his broad shoulders.

A rifle was swinging from his back, a lariat hung at his saddle horn, and he had a belt of arms.

This much Buffalo Bill took in as the man came along the river trail.

He then took notice that the bank shelved back from the river just there, and the horseman could not yet have seen the stream.

But as he neared the ford he came to a halt, dismounted, and, with a caution gained by long experience with the danger, doubtless, dismounted and crept up to the top of the steep bank and peered over.

He had seen the trail ahead, leading to the river, and felt that it must lead to a ford.

As he peered over and across the stream, Buffalo Bill saw by the start he gave that he had made some discovery.

The scout's attention had been wholly upon the horseman up to this point, but now he quickly turned his head and glanced across the river.

The discovery that he made was a surprise to him, indeed.

"I have found more than I want at one time," he muttered.

What he saw across the stream was the Woman of the Iron Hand.

She had come down to the edge of the water, and was mounted upon her splendid black horse.

The animal moved a few steps, and paused to drink.

The woman's eyes were riveted across the ford, and she had raised her black veil.

But her face was concealed by her hands holding a field glass up to her eyes, and with which she was reconnoitring the other side of the river.

Her hands, the scout noted, were concealed in a pair of black gauntlet gloves.

And the scout made another note of what he saw.

The woman, of course, did not see him, concealed in the cedar bushes, nor did she see the strange horseman.

The latter had discovered her, and his actions did not go to prove the scout's suspicion that he was one of her two comrades.

The man's face Buffalo Bill could not see, but he did observe that his actions were quick and excited.

He had slipped back down the steep bank, leaped into his saddle, unslung his rifle, and was slowly advancing toward the ford, as though he hoped to get there just as the woman crossed.

That he was excited from some cause the scout could see.

But Buffalo Bill was perfectly calm.

What was to take place he felt he was to be a witness of.

He felt that if the two met, as the man rode out from behind the bank, and the woman came across the stream, that he, from his point of vantage, would be within a hundred feet of both of them.

Under the circumstances, Buffalo Bill did not mind being an eavesdropper, and he was going to make the very best of his chance situation.

As the man neared the break in the bank, Buffalo Bill saw that the woman had started to come across.

She had swung her feet upon the neck of her horse, to keep them dry, and, holding on to her saddle horns, thus rode and supported herself.

The man had peeped around the bank, quickly drew back, and, rifle in hand, waited.

Did he mean to hold her up or kill her?

Whatever he attempted, the scout was ready to also act.

But the black horse had evidently scented danger.

Perhaps he had caught a glance of the horse of the stranger, as he was quickly drawn back by his master, so as not to ride into view.

At any rate, the black gave a loud snort, as though of fear.

The woman quickly halted him.

"What is it, Black Boy?" and the question she asked her horse reached the scout's ears.

The horseman heard it, also, without a doubt, for he settled himself in his saddle, and grasped his rifle more firmly. The scout did the same as to his rifle.

The woman was about half way across the stream, and the swift current made it hard for her horse to stand still.

"We won't risk it, Black Boy," said the woman, and she was about to turn back, when the strange horseman spurred into view, his rifle at a level, and his voice rang as he shouted:

"Halt, Kate Kennon, or I will kill you as I would a wolf!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

QUICKLY DONE.

The words of the horseman, shouted with savage earnestness toward a woman, be she what she might, fairly startled Buffalo Bill.

He at once rose from his sitting posture and stood ready to spring into view.

Upon the woman the effect, whatever she might feel, was not shown by any great alarm.

She was startled, of course.

She halted her horse as she was about to turn, and sat in her saddle, gazing at the man, having lowered her black veil.

That she knew the man was certain.

But she, after a second or two of hesitation, called back, in a voice that had not a tremor in it, but was musical and firm:

"That you would keep your word, Harold Carr, I do not doubt. But I would rather be killed by your bullet than be again in your power, so I shall take the chances and try to escape!"

"Hold, I say! I am merciless!" shouted the man.

The woman laughed defiantly as she wheeled her horse, then uttered a cry of surprise, for she had seen Buffalo Bill spring into view.

She also heard the words the scout uttered:

"Hands up, you coward!"

A cry broke from the man's lips, and he turned to fire upon the scout.

But ere he could pull trigger the revolver, for Buffalo Bill had thrown aside his rifle and drawn a revolver, flashed, and the bullet sped where it was aimed, not at the life of the horseman, but at his left hand, upholding his weapon.

With the report the rifle dropped from the grasp of the man, going off as it did so, and the bullet narrowly missing Buffalo Bill.

"Want me, white chief?" answered the Indian from the distant camp.

"No, stay where you are, but all keep your eyes open, for a visitor came to camp, and I failed to lasso her."

Walking up to the iron gray, Buffalo Bill spoke soothingly to him, and soon quieted him.

Then he went to his post and waited.

About two hours after Surgeon Powell came to him on his midnight rounds.

"What was it, Bill?" he asked.

Buffalo Bill told him just what had occurred.

"Well, you thwarted her, if it was the woman, which I can hardly believe."

"And failed to catch her."

"Yes, but I do not think the horses will be run off to-night, and that is a great deal."

"Yes."

"I will go on the rounds, now, and, as I said before, you do the same before dawn."

Surgeon Powell walked on, and visited Wild Bill, Silent Sam, and the Indian in camp, telling each one of what had happened.

The prisoner was awake, and sneeringly said:

"She gave you a scare, did she?"

"Well, she'll do worse before this trail is ended."

Surgeon Powell made no reply, examined the manacles on the prisoner, and, after a few words with Man Killer, passed on.

He returned to his post, and the time glided away.

Two hours after Buffalo Bill again took the rounds.

All was well, and, as it was very nearly dawn, he told Man Killer to build up the fire, and sent Silent Sam to the camp to get breakfast.

But he, Surgeon Powell, and Wild Bill remained guard over the horses until called to breakfast, just at dawn.

The night had passed without the horses being kidnapped, but it had kept the whole camp awake all night to guard them, and, had it not been for Buffalo Bill, the midnight visitor, the Woman in Black, would surely have gotten the animals.

CHAPTER L.

THE PRISONER PLOTTING.

At breakfast the alarm of the night was talked over, and, though the prisoner ate apart from the others, where he could get no chance to "doctor" the food or drink in any way, he laughed at the party for having been outwitted by the woman, though the five had been on guard, and she had come directly into their camp.

Surgeon Powell and Buffalo Bill did not reply to his mocking words, but Wild Bill said:

"This trail has not come to an end yet, pard, and when it does I'll gamble big money on it that we know all about that woman, and when we go back you won't be with us."

"No, I'll have escaped, as I never saw the irons yet that could hold me when I got ready to go."

"I wasn't thinking of your escape."

"What then?"

"I was thinking of our leaving you behind—in your grave."

The man was silenced at once, and having finished their breakfast, all began to prepare for the trail.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, pards," said Surgeon Powell, after he had dressed the cut in Silent Sam's head and the wounds of the prisoner.

"Yes, doc."

"We'll keep this camp, leaving the prisoner here, and Silent Sam here to guard it."

"We'll leave the horses, too, for we can do better on foot in finding the trail we are after, and then can follow it."

"I think you are right, Frank."

"Yes, Bill, for there will be four of us to look for it, and we will have the day before us."

"Then, too, we must meet the stage coach, for it will pass along this morning."

This was decided upon, and so the three pards, with Man Killer accompanying them, started off on foot, to look up the trail of the fugitives, after it had reached the ridge.

Silent Sam was left in the camp to guard it and the prisoner, and the latter Surgeon Powell left with his feet only manacled, as his wounded hand he did not wish to retard in its recovery, for it was doing well.

The chain about his ankles, however, was wound once around a small sapling, so that the prisoner could not move from his position, and Silent Sam was given the key to the irons, to let him give the man a rest at dinner time.

Taking a lunch with them, in case they should be gone all day, the party then left together, while Silent Sam took up his position where he could watch all the approaches to the camp.

Hardly had the party been lost to sight when the prisoner seemed to brighten up.

He looked at the form of Silent Sam, standing a hundred yards away, and then began to tug at his manacles.

The manacles were too small to slip over his feet, he soon discovered.

Then he began to measure the length of the chain that held them together.

It was some three feet in length, but a turn around a small sapling had shortened it by a foot.

The prisoner's blankets were spread by the tree, so that he could lie down upon them, and his saddle had been placed there as a rest for his back or head.

It was a Mexican saddle, and the stirrups were massive and heavy affairs.

Suddenly an idea flashed upon him, and with one hand he began to unstrap a stirrup from the saddle.

He was able to do so after awhile, and pulled the leather guard off of the stirrup leather, and then put it back again.

This gave him a very dangerous weapon, indeed, for he could swing the heavy stirrup with great force in a blow.

This work done, he put the saddle back, so as to hide what he had done, and then waited.

He could do nothing else than bide his time.

Thus an hour passed, and Silent Sam walked up to the camp, to see how he was getting along.

"Say, pard, I want to talk with you."

"Well?"

"You know me?"

"I guess."

"I know you."

"Maybe."

"Surgeon Powell intends to kill me when he gets good and ready."

"Yes."

"It's money in your pocket to let me go."

"How much?"

"Call it a couple of thousand."

"Where is it?"

"I've got it, for, strange to say, I was not robbed, but allowed to keep my money."

"It is not enough."

"I've only got three thousand."

"You won't need any, if you die."

"That's so."

"I'll give you the three thousand if you let me escape."

Silent Sam did not reply for several minutes, and then said suddenly and with a firmness of manner that was startling:

"No, for I know you and all that it would mean for you to escape."

"You appeal to the wrong one, Harold Carr, when you ask me to aid you, for I know all you would do."

CHAPTER LI.

THE ESCAPE.

The face of the prisoner turned pale at the sudden words of the trapper.

He did not speak for a moment, and then said:

"Silent Sam, some day I will even up matters with you, for I tell you now that I do not intend to be shot down in cold blood, or hanged like a dog. The end is not yet—for me."

The trapper made no reply, and soon after the prisoner said:

"Say, I didn't eat much breakfast this morning, so give me a cold snack."

Silent Sam walked to the fire, where the remains of the breakfast yet were, and picked up from the frying pan a piece of venison steak.

This he carried to the prisoner, who rose as he approached.

Taking the edibles, he said:

"Now bring me a cup of water, please."

Silent Sam walked away to obey.

He soon returned, bringing a canteen of fresh water.

"They are coming back," said the prisoner, as the water was almost within his reach, and he looked off toward the horses as he spoke.

Silent Sam turned to look in the direction indicated, when, with a quick and hard swing the heavy stirrup was brought down with great force upon his head.

Silent Sam dropped senseless.

A malignant smile of triumph came over the face of the prisoner, and he at once bent over the motionless form and thrust his hand in his pockets.

The key of the irons was almost the first thing he found, and it did not take him long to free himself.

Then he grasped the trapper's knife, and seemed about to drive it in his heart.

But, thinking better of it, he said:

"No, if he is not dead, I will not kill him—that redskin would avenge him. I'll tie him."

With a lasso he did this, and well, while Silent Sam lay motionless, the blood trickling from the gash the heavy stirrup had cut in his head.

Then the man worked rapidly.

The stirrup was put back on the saddle, then a bag of provisions was taken from the supplies of the scouts.

Next his own trappings were gathered together and put upon a pack saddle.

With but one hand to work with, for the wounded one was of little use, Harold Carr could not get along as fast as he wished.

But he had all ready soon, and, taking a piece of paper from his pocket, and a pencil, he wrote:

"Surgeon Powell:

"I have made my escape, even though I was the prisoner of such renowned men as yourself, Buffalo Bill, and Wild Bill.

"I have taken your horses, all of them, so you will have to take the back trail to the fort, and you know that some day the settlement between you and I will come, with the chances in my favor."

"To follow the trail of that Woman in Black is fatal, so give it up."

"I will not say good-by, for we shall meet again, so au revoir."

"Yours until death,

"HAROLD CARR."

Then followed a postscript:

"I used my stirrup on Silent Sam, knocking him out with one blow."

"I believe he is dead."

The piece of paper was put on the breast of Silent Sam, and then the daring man walked rapidly to where the horses were.

Pulling up the stakes, he tied the animals two by two, except the one he intended to ride and use as a pack horse.

All were led up to the camp, and Silent Sam lay as he had fallen, motionless as death.

Quickly saddling his own horse and the pack animal, Harold Carr mounted and rode out of camp.

He had escaped, seemingly, when all attempts to do so would have been impossible.

Unable to bribe the old trapper, he had taken advantage of a kind act toward

him to deal him a blow that surely looked to have been fatal, for Silent Sam yet lay motionless, just as he had fallen.

It was some time after the departure of the escaped prisoner from the camp before Silent Sam showed any signs of life.

Then his breast began to heave.

He moved his leg, then a hand, his head turned from side to side, and he uttered a groan.

Another moment and his eyes opened. Gazing about him, he seemed for awhile to be dazed.

Then intelligence came back into his eyes, and with a sudden motion he attempted to rise.

He could not do so, and realized that he was bound hand and foot.

He uttered a moan, as though of mental, rather than physical, pain, and his eyes closed again.

But as he did so he heard a shout, and his name was called in a loud tone.

CHAPTER LII.

HELD UP.

When Surgeon Powell left the camp with his two long-tried comrades and the Indian, they made their way up to the top of the range to the point where the trail of the fugitives, and their own in following, came out upon the summit.

"There are four of us, so we can divide here," said the Surgeon Scout.

"Yes, two of us can take this side of the range, one going each way, and two the other.

"We can thus cover a long distance, if need be, and if we find a trail, where those we are after have left the range, we can come back and notify each other by shots," said Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, that will be the way, Bill. But, we must not go over half a dozen miles from this point," the surgeon said.

"And the coach?"

"Yes, Bill, we will take the way to the right here, to meet it first, while Wild Bill and Man Killer go to the left. If we make any discovery, Wild Bill, we will send word to you by the driver of the coach."

So it was arranged, and the four parted.

Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell went up the ridge, one on each side, Wild Bill and Man Killer down it.

The summit of the range was very nearly level, and it was from a couple of hundred yards to half a mile in width.

The surgeon and Buffalo Bill walked briskly to their posts, as the others did, and the start was made.

All were to follow the windings, clear to the edge, to discover just where the fugitives had gone over, if possible, and they then continued on their trail, having, as they doubtless supposed, thrown their pursuers off the scent.

One mile, two, had the surgeon and Cody gone, keeping very nearly the same pace, when there came to their ears the sound of approaching wheels.

They knew that it was the coach.

The hard soil of the ridge made the wheels rumble loudly, and the two men moved away from the edge of the range toward the centre.

Even there the coach trail was but faintly marked, owing to the rocky track it followed.

"Ho, Bill, you heard it, too," called out Doctor Powell, as the two came within hailing distance.

"Yes, Frank. It will soon come in sight, for the driver is sending his team along at a good pace," answered the scout.

A moment after, around a bend a few hundred yards away, came the coach.

The six horses were at a good pace, and the driver was urging them.

He was alone on the box, and, glancing ahead, saw the two men barring his way, and at once drew rein with great suddenness.

"It is Fred Fletcher, and he thinks he is to be held up," said Surgeon Powell, as he recognized the driver.

Then he took off his black army sombrero, and waving it, shouted:

"Ho, Fred, we are friends! Come on!"

The driver then waved his slouch hat, gave a shout, and brought his team along at a slapping pace.

As he neared the spot where the two friends were standing, he drew down to a slow pace, until he finally halted.

"Well, Doctor Powell, I am just awful glad ter see yer," he said, in an earnest voice, dropping his reins on the backs of his wheel horses and leaping to the ground.

"Why, Fred, you look as though you had seen a ghost," said the Surgeon Scout.

"No, but seen two ghosts made, Surgeon Powell."

"What do you mean?"

"Two kilt."

"Ah! Passengers?"

"Sogers."

"Then you have been held up?"

"I has."

"And two of your passengers were killed?"

"Sure."

"This is bad. Where was this?"

"Back on the trail half a dozen miles, sir."

"Soldiers, you say?"

"Black cavalry, sir."

"Ah! you had two black soldiers as passengers?"

"Yes, sir. The road-agents held up the coach, and I told 'em they'd git nixie, for I traveled light. But they said as how they'd take a look inside ther hearse, and there they found the two black soldiers."

"And a fight followed?"

"No, sir. They jist told them two poor fellers ter git out, and they had a good look at 'em, and the result was they tained ter me and said:

"Fred Fletcher, yer lied ter us, for yer does carry a rich find, as we wants these two men, fer reasons ther knows well, when we tell 'em we recognizes 'em as havin' been in ther Perdido raid."

"Then ther two sogers looked scared awful, and ther two road-agents tained to ther chief and asks what was ter be done."

"Ther reply come quick and sharp."

"They must die!"

"Now, Surgeon Powell, who does yer think ther leader was?"

"A woman," said Buffalo Bill, speaking for the first time.

CHAPTER LIII.

A WOMAN'S DEADLY HAND.

At the words of Buffalo Bill, Fred Fletcher, the stage driver, looked him squarely in the face.

He had observed him before, and been impressed with his very striking appearance.

Now he said:

"You knows her then, pard; but I doesn't know you."

"It is my friend, Buffalo Bill, Fred, the great Chief of Scouts of whom you have heard so much."

"Lordy! Does yer mean it, doctor?"

"I certainly do, Fred — William F. Cody, Buffalo Bill, and the King of Plainsman," said Doctor Powell, with a smile.

The driver appeared to be taken aback, for he beheld before him the man he had so longed to meet, of whom he had heard so much.

But Buffalo Bill stepped forward, and, offering his hand, said, in his frank way:

"I have heard of you, Pard Fletcher, as one of the crack drivers of the Rockies, and I am glad to meet you."

They shook hands warmly, and then the driver said:

"So you knows it was a woman who held me up?"

"Yes, I guessed it, for she has been raiding the stage trails in the north, and is a bold and clever one."

"Well, she's down here now playin' ther same game."

"Yes, my pard, Wild Bill, and I came down this way to find her."

"Whar is Wild Bill, pard?"

"Not very far away."

"You will pass him on this ridge."

"I have heard of him often, and if you and him is along with Surgeon Powell on a trail, yer'll catch what you is after, if it's ther Devil himself."

"We hope to do so, Fred, though from all accounts it appears to be a she devil we are after. Tell us more about your being held up."

"Yer see, gents," began Fletcher, "when I seen ther road-agent tarn to ther woman, I kinder thought thar would be mercy shown."

"But, Lord love yer, she took me aback, clean off my feet, when she says:

"Them nigs must die."

"Ther two black sogers seemed all broke up, and says I to her:

"Does yer mean it?"

"I does," says she.

"And you a woman," says I.

"Yes, a woman who has suffered, and by those men and their comrades."

"A woman as knows how ter avenge a wrong," says she.

"Waal, gents, I begged for them two black sogers, and they went me a little better in ther beggin'."

"But it were all for no good, for that woman sat there on her black horse, dressed as black as a undertaker, and with a veil over her face, and she tells me thet them two men must die."

"Poor fellers, I felt that sorry for them I jist concluded I'd fight ther lay-out, seein' only ther two men and ther woman, and expecting ther sogers ter help me."

"But when I called to them ter chip in with me, they would not draw a weapon, and one of 'em said, sad like, and in a way I'll never forget:

"No, boss, we has ter die, fer thar is a doom writ down ag'in us black cavalry out here, jist because a troop made thet Perdido raid."

"We thanks yer, boss, and says good-by, for we has got ter go, and thar is plenty more of these fellers in hidin', as we is sartin."

"We is sogers, boss, and though we was scared, and don't want ter be kilt, we has got ter die, and we is ready."

"Gents, I was that sorry and mad I jist concluded ter see if there were more of 'em about, and I began ter feel fer my gun, when that woman covered me thet quick I never see ther like."

"Hands up!" says she, 'or thar will be three dead corpses instid of two,' and she called out:

"Men, shoot thet driver if he moves a finger."

"She 'peared ter be talkin' to somebody out of sight, and I caved; I didn't move a finger."

"Ther next I know'd, gents, was hearin' two quick shots, and if yer will believe me, it was ther woman who fired 'em, and them two poor black sogers dropped dead in ther tracks, and ther bullets hed hit 'em squar in ther forehead atween ther eyes."

It was with intense interest that the surgeon and Buffalo Bill listened to the driver's story of a woman's cruel deed.

They could hardly believe it of one who had given Surgeon Powell a horse in place of his own, had treated them mercifully, never once harming them seriously, and had only kidnapped their horses.

But in this case she had been merciless to two negro soldiers, and her very act certainly connected her with the mysterious killing of the black cavalry at Fort Benham, the perpetrators of which Surgeon Powell had taken the trail to hunt down.

CHAPTER LIV.

TO PUSH THE PURSUIT HARD.

"Well, Bill, what do you think of the Woman of the Iron Hand now?" asked Surgeon Powell, when he had heard all that had been witnessed by Fred Fletcher.

"I almost regret not allowing that fellow Carr to have fired on her that day at the river, for it would have saved the lives of those two poor soldiers."

"Yes; but I have an abiding faith that we will yet run her and her road-agents down."

"I feel the same way, Frank," and, turning to the driver, he asked:

"Pard Fletcher, how long ago was this?"

"Little over an hour."

"And how far back?"

"About half a dozen miles, sir."

"What was done with the bodies?"

"They is in ther coach."

They stepped to the coach, opened the door, and there were the bodies of the two negro soldiers.

The bullets had entered the very centre of their foreheads.

"That shows nerve, Frank, and a very steady hand with the revolver, woman's though it was."

"Yes, Bill. The Man Killer properly named her when he called her the Woman of the Iron Hand."

"Did she rob you, Pard Fletcher?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Well, she didn't, 'cause why? I hadn't nothin' of value along. Her two companions searched ther dead blacks, and got a little money, their watches, and some trinkets they was takin' to their pards at ther fort."

"Poor fellows! and then?"

"They just rode away and left me."

"And you came right along?"

"I put ther bodies in ther coach, and then made ther critters step lively."

"And which way did the woman go?"

"Right on down ther ridge."

"Did you see any one else?"

"Not a soul."

"Then if there were others they kept hidden?"

"They did. But I'm of ther idee they was all."

"Frank, we'll go back with Pard Fletcher here, to where we turn off to our camp."

"Yes."

"You can write your letter there to the colonel, while I push on to camp and get all ready for a quick move after these fellows."

"That is just it, Bill."

"And then Pard Fred can push on fast, and if he finds Wild Bill and the Indian a long way off, he will, I know, pick them up and drive them back a few miles, so we can lose no time, for the road-agents will then find us on their trail much sooner than they expect, and we will have the better part of the day to rush them."

"The very thing, Bill, and we'll be off at once," replied Surgeon Powell, adding:

"I begin to feel merciless toward that woman now, since I've seen her latest work."

"As I do."

"But I do not just understand one thing, Bill."

"Well?"

"She came down from the north country, just before you and Wild Bill."

"Yes."

"Her act to-day in killing those men shows that she is the one who hunts the black troops."

"Sure."

"And yet when she was in the north country the murders of the black soldiers at Fort Benham were going on."

"That is so."

"How do you account for it?"

"She had her allies here."

"That is just it."

"But, Fred, remember, you are not to speak to any one, save Colonel Thorp, about having seen us on the trail."

"I won't, doctor."

"Give him the letter I will write, when we halt where Buffalo Bill turns off to go to our camp, and bring an answer back, leaving it for me where I will show you, for we will not be very far from this locality, in my opinion, as these road-agents must have a retreat near here."

"I guesses they has, sir, for each time I has been held up it has been on this ridge, or in the valley near it."

The two pards then got upon the coach with Fred Fletcher, and Buffalo Bill took the reins, with the remark:

"I'll send 'em along for you, Pard Fred."

"Yer can handle six of 'em, then?"

"I guess so," and Buffalo Bill was not long in showing Fred Fletcher that he could handle the reins with a skill that was wonderful, for he had driven stage in the Rocky Mountains when he was not out of his teens.

The team soon realized that a master held them in hand, and they traveled at a very lively gait.

Reaching the halting place, Buffalo Bill drew them up quickly, causing Fred Fletcher to say, with enthusiasm:

"Well, you can do it—no one better have I ever seen."

Springing from the box, and leaving Surgeon Powell to write his letter to Colonel Thorp, Buffalo Bill bade the driver good-by, and started town the trail to the camp.

After a rapid walk he came in sight of the camp, to suddenly stop and cry:

"Where are the horses?"

Walking rapidly on, he saw the animals nowhere in sight, nor did he see the prisoner, as he neared the camp, so he called loudly the name of Silent Sam.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SCOUT'S DISCOVERY.

Buffalo Bill felt a dread that all was not right in the camp the moment he saw that the horses were gone.

He hastened on to the camp proper, and then beheld the prostrate and bound form of Silent Sam.

What did it mean? Could it be that in the broad glare of day that strange and daring woman had entered the camp and gotten the best of a man who had the reputation that Silent Sam had as a thorough plainsman?

At all events, he was there, and bound.

The horses, too, were gone.

The cut on the trapper's head, made by the heavy stirrup when the prisoner had dealt the blow, met the eye of the scout.

Instantly he set to work to free the bound man.

His lips alone could tell the story.

Buffalo Bill saw that the man had been dealt a severe blow.

His face was white, the stirrup had cut to the bone, he had lost considerable blood, and the blow had been one of such stunning force that it had rendered him unconscious for a considerable length of time.

In a very short while Buffalo Bill had Silent Sam free, and then he gave him a drink from his canteen, bathed the wound, and chafed the hands and lower limbs, rendered stiff from their being long and tightly bound.

It was not very long before Silent Sam rallied, for he began to show color in his face, his eyes lost their glassy look, and at last, with an effort, he said, huskily:

"He got away with me, didn't he?"

"Who?"

"The prisoner."

"Then it was not the woman?"

"No."

"The prisoner escaped?"

"Yes."

"Did he take the horses?"

"They are gone."

"All of them?"

"Yes."

"He kept his word, then."

"What was it?"

"To leave us afoot."

"The woman was not here, then?"

"No."

"He mastered you alone?"

"Yes."

"That is strange, in irons, as he was."

"It was trickery and treachery."

"Tell me about it."

"He tried to bribe me."

"Yes."

"Then he played the game of being hungry and thirsty."

"I see."

"He had stripped his stirrup off of the saddle, and stood up as I approached, and dealt me a blow he meant should kill, I guess."

"It was a severe one."

"I tried to dodge, but too late, and I went down under it."

"I should think so."

"It seemed to crack my skull, hard as it is—to crush the bone."

"It did not, though, for I have examined it well."

"It was a severe blow, however, but Doctor Powell will soon fix it up all right for you."

"Where are the others?"

"On the ridge."

"They will wait there for me, so I will go after them, as we cannot follow the road-agents now, as we had hoped to do."

"Why not?"

"The horses are gone."

Silent Sam muttered an oath, and Buffalo Bill, rising quickly, said:

"I will go at once to the ridge, for I may be able to catch the coach."

With this he started off at a run.

Arriving at the ridge, where he had asked Surgeon Powell to await him, he found that he was there, as also were Wild Bill and the Indian.

All seemed surprised at beholding him, and listened with amazement to the story he had to tell.

"Now, Man Killer, can you catch that coach, for if you do I'll give you the finest outfit on the border?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Will try," and the Indian sprang to his feet.

"It has a long start, Bill, for Wild Bill and Man Killer were on their way back when they met Fletcher, and they have been here a couple of hours," said Surgeon Powell.

"If you catch it, go on to the fort, and bring us back horses, for we can only wait here."

"If you cannot catch it, wait where you are and I will meet you with provisions, so you can continue on to the fort on foot, and Surgeon Powell will write a letter for you to carry to Colonel Thorp," said Buffalo Bill.

Man Killer put down his rifle, drew his belt tighter, and bounded away along the trail.

"Now, Frank, you write another letter to the colonel at the fort, while Wild Bill puts up a bag of food for the Indian and hastens back here with it, where I will wait, for I can then start off after Man Killer."

The words of Buffalo Bill were quickly acted upon, for Surgeon Powell and Wild Bill started rapidly down the slope to the camp.

In just half an hour Buffalo Bill saw Wild Bill coming back.

He had the Indian's blankets and a bag of provisions, also a letter Surgeon Powell had written to Colonel Fred Thorp, as his own regiment loved to call their popular commander.

Buffalo Bill took up the rifle of the Indian, to carry it on after him, and with the other things brought by Wild Bill, started off at a long, swinging walk.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE INDIAN RUNNER.

Before leaving Wild Bill, Buffalo Bill had advised him that he had better start at once on the trail of the horses, so that he could see just how rapidly they had traveled and if there was any sign that the escaped prisoner, not dreading pursuit, intended to halt.

He also said he would like to know if the prisoner wound around to the ridge again, as though he intended to go on the trail of the road-agents.

If so, he certainly must know where their retreat was, whether he was one of them or not.

Just what he was to the road-agent band Buffalo Bill could not fathom, as he knew from his own experience that

the man would have killed the Woman in Black had he not prevented.

"Some former member of the band, and a discarded lover, I take it," was his comment to Wild Bill, and he added:

"If we can follow that horse trail, while waiting for the Indian's return with recruits for us, we may be able to track the road-agents to their lair.

"They, knowing we are dismounted, will naturally suppose we have all returned to the fort, and by giving that impression, by changing our camp, we will be able to learn something, perhaps.

"That Indian is a fleet and tireless runner, and may overtake the coach."

"Silent Sam told me when I was in camp that it was down grade for forty miles, and Fred Fletcher would put his team to it all the way, for the relay station was that distance off, as they are very few and far between in these mountains," said Wild Bill.

"Well, the Indian can get a horse at the stage station, if he does not overtake the coach before getting there.

"If I had known that it was down grade for such a distance, I would not have started the Indian to catch the coach, but let him push on for the fort direct.

"I do not believe he can catch it with the start that Fletcher has."

With this Buffalo Bill had gone on the Indian's track, while Wild Bill returned to camp, to pick up the trail of the stolen horses.

Buffalo Bill was as good a walker as he was a rider.

Often, from earliest boyhood, he had made many a long tramp on foot, and he had copied the swinging trot of the Indian, a pace that carries them very far in a day, and was not very fatiguing.

Dropping into this swinging gait, he left the miles rapidly behind him, and when his watch told him that he had been two hours on the run, he knew that he had covered a dozen miles.

Another two hours passed, and the sun was drawing close to the horizon.

Still another hour he went on, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"That Indian goes well, for I know I have made thirty miles."

He had just come to a bend in the ridge, where he had a view of the trail several miles ahead.

Far in the distance he saw the Indian runner trotting along.

It was white man against Indian, and, as usual, the paleface was the victor.

Spurting rapidly, Buffalo Bill began to overhaul the redskin, and drew near enough for him to hear a shot, he felt assured.

Taking his rifle, he fired, without stopping in his run.

The Indian heard the shot, turned, seemed to be satisfied, and halted.

In ten minutes Buffalo Bill came up, and both showed the effects of their rapid run.

"No catch him," said Man Killer.

"No, he drove too fast for you, and had too long a start."

"White chief run like deer."

"I can get along a little bit. But, here are your provisions, blankets, and rifle, and you can get a horse at the stage station, a dozen miles ahead, and should reach the fort, changing animals at the three stations Surgeon Powell says are on the coach trail, by to-morrow night."

"Man Killer get there."

"I do not doubt it. But, yonder is a stream, so we will camp there, have supper, and then you can push ahead, while I go back to our comrades."

"Great chief know."

The two then went to the bank of the little stream, a fire was lighted, supper gotten, and after a smoke they arose to start on their separate way.

It was dark now, but darkness did not disturb them in the least, so they grasped hands in farewell, and started, the Indian in his dog trot, the scout at a walk, for he had a long tramp back to camp, and it was uphill work for him now.

CHAPTER LVII.

A CHANGE OF CAMPS.

It was yet a couple of hours before dawn when Buffalo Bill heard the challenge, when nearing his camp:

"Halt! hands up!"

"Ho, Frank, you are on the alert, I see."

"Yes, Bill. What luck?"

"I caught the redskin, after a thirty-mile chase."

"No other man could have done it."

"Thanks. But, he had not caught the stage, though I do not blame him, as the trail was excellent for wheels, and all down grade, while Fletcher doubtless pushed ahead hard, being some hours behind time."

"Yes; he's a hard driver, anyway."

"We camped and had supper, then Man Killer pushed on, and, getting a fresh mount at the three stations, he'll pass the coach by dawn, and get to the fort by night."

"Yes, but it will be a four days' delay for us here, at least."

"No doubt. But where is Wild Bill?"

"He set off on the trail of the horses as soon as he got to camp, and has not yet returned."

"He camped on the trail, and will turn up to-morrow."

"Yes."

"How is Silent Sam?"

"Better, but that was a hard blow he got, and a narrow escape from death."

"I thought so myself. But, there is no need of standing guard, so turn in, for I'm as tired as I can well be."

"I do not wonder, after standing guard all last night, tramping hard all the morning, then having a thirty-mile run, and a climb back of the same distance. You are a pine knot, Bill."

"We are two of a kind, Frank, for toughness."

"Physical, I hope you mean, not moral toughness, Bill," and the Surgeon Scout laughed, while suddenly before the two appeared the tall form of Wild Bill.

"Well, pard, I am back again," and Wild Bill dropped wearily down by the side of his companions.

"Any discovery, Bill?" asked Surgeon Powell.

"I took the trail, and that fellow lighted out lively with those horses, I can tell you. Why, I've been sixty miles since I left here."

"So has Buffalo Bill."

"Did you catch the redskin, pard?"

"Yes."

"Did he catch the coach?"

"No."

"You did your part."

"He will do his now. But, what did you discover, Bill?" asked Cody.

"The trail led down into the valley, up it along the stream, and he kept up a telling pace for twenty miles, as the tracks showed. Guess he thought we were runners, and might overtake him."

"Wish you could have done so."

"Couldn't."

"He slackened speed after about twenty miles, wore around, and up to the range again, climbing it by the stage trail. I got to the stage trail, and saw where he had crossed it, going toward the valley on the other side of the range."

"It was sunset then, and, having found that he had thus doubled on his tracks, and really come back nearer to us, I determined to camp for supper and return. This I did, and here I am; but I have a piece of advice to offer."

"Well?"

"About a mile from here, down in the valley, is a canyon, and there is a good spring in it, and plenty of wood. I could hardly pick up the trail until I had passed it, and I went in there, wondering if the prisoner had gone that way."

"It is a blind canyon, I found, and the soil leaves no trail at its entrance, but a short distance up the canyon it is a perfect garden, so I say take up traps and go there to-night."

"On foot we cannot be tracked there, and I believe we can climb up to the ridge and stage trail out of the canyon, so be as near it as from here."

"You see, the Indian won't be back with horses for some days, so we need only watch for him about the time to expect him."

"A good idea. What do you say, Buffalo Bill?"

"By all means go, and at once," was the answer.

Silent Sam was aroused, and the camp outfit gathered and put on a pole between Cody and Wild Bill, while Surgeon Powell carried a large bundle and Silent Sam the weapons.

So they started, and in half an hour had entered the canyon.

Wild Bill led the way through the darkness to the spring, which was sheltered by a thick growth of small pines, and here the tired party spread their blankets to get a few hours of rest.

It was late when they awoke, the camp was put in good shape, breakfast gotten, Silent Sam's wound dressed, and all made comfortable for a stay of several days.

Later, Surgeon Powell, leaving Wild Bill in camp with Silent Sam, asked Buffalo Bill to accompany him, and the two started up the canyon, to try and reach the ridge.

This they did, finding an easy way, and as it was only a couple of hours' walk to where Wild Bill had said the escaped prisoner had crossed the stage trail into the other valley, they decided to go there and see just where he had gone after leaving the range.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE FUGITIVE'S TRAIL.

"Frank, I'll tell you what is best to be done?"

It was Buffalo Bill who spoke, and he addressed Surgeon Powell.

It was a little after noon, and the two were seated in the valley into which Wild Bill had trailed the escaped prisoner.

They had struck his trail at the ridge, where it turned off, followed it down into the valley, and there found that he had gone into camp, doubtless for the night, as he had reached that spot by dark.

Here they halted and had a cold dinner, and Buffalo Bill uttered the words that open this chapter.

"Well, Bill, what is it?"

"My plan is for you to return to camp from here, I taking what food we both need, and you remain all night, then start out to-morrow with several days' supplies."

"I will spend the rest of the day on this trail, and when you get here to-morrow, will be on hand to meet you."

"If I have made any discovery, well and good, but if not, we can continue the hunt the balance of the day, and the next, when one of us can go to meet the Indian with the horses."

"I believe your plan is a good one, Bill, and I'll go back to camp. You need a rest, so you turn in early to-night, and I'll be here by nine o'clock to-morrow, and learn what you have discovered, if anything."

"All right, so it will be," answered Buffalo Bill, and, having taken a limited supply of food, he started upon the trail of the escaped prisoner once more, while Surgeon Powell, at a brisk step, went off on his return to the camp in the canyon.

Buffalo Bill had little difficulty in following the trail, for no effort had been made by Harold Carr to conceal it, apparently.

He evidently thought that he had left the scouts helpless, utterly unable to do anything else save go back to the fort.

The idea did not occur to him that they might send one of their party to the fort for horses and the others remain there.

He looked for a week to elapse at least before he need have any fear of them.

For several miles Buffalo Bill followed the trail down the valley, and then came to where it had crossed a large stream.

It was fordable, and, with his clothes and weapons held above his head, Buffalo Bill lost no time in getting over to the other side.

There began a barren plain, and a short distance from the stream the trail was lost sight of.

But the scout did not despair.

He noted the way the trail was going when he lost sight of it, and then he stopped to study the nature of the range toward which it went.

The range was over a score of miles away, and the scout's field glass picked out a break in it, where there was a canyon.

"That fellow knows this country well, I am sure, and yonder canyon is the place he headed for."

"I cannot get back to meet Frank Powell in the morning if I go there, but I can leave a note here for him, for he will come on my trail the moment he sees that I did not return to the camp where we had dinner."

A note was written, in a cypher which Buffalo Bill knew that Surgeon Powell and a few others alone understood, and fastened on a stick, it was stuck up just where the trail of the fugitive faded out of sight in the hard, barren soil of the plain.

Taking a large stick, then, with sharpened end, Buffalo Bill started, dragging it after him.

It left but a slight trace, one barely noticeable, but the scout knew that Surgeon Powell would see it and follow it.

Every now and then, as he advanced, he would turn a small stone over, that was along the way, and thus more thoroughly marked his trail.

It was nearly dark when he reached the verge of the range, and he could see that quite a considerable stream flowed there.

As he neared it, the plain became less barren, and to his delight he saw that he had very closely followed the trail of the stolen horses, for the tracks came into sight again, and led directly toward the canyon entrance, and which penetrated the range.

Arriving at the bank of the stream, he found it fordable, and at once began to prepare to cross it, as he had the other.

This he did, and thus he took the now broadly marked trail up the canyon.

For over a mile he followed it, to find that it branched into two canyons, each narrowing as they penetrated the range.

But he took the one the trail entered, and held on until it was dark, for he had his canteen full of water, and intended camping when too dark to travel further.

At last he began to look about for a camping place, for he could hardly see the trail, but halted suddenly, as he came in sight of the glimmer of a camp-fire ahead.

"Ah! at last!" he muttered, as he kept on his way, for the firelight was a beacon now to guide him.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE REDSKIN MESSENGER.

Colonel Alfred Thorp sat in his pleasant quarters, enjoying an after-supper cigar, though his face wore a troubled expression.

Half an hour before, and just after nightfall, he had been startled by the report that two negro soldiers had been found dead on post, each with an arrow in his breast.

Since the departure of Surgeon Powell to hunt a clue to this unknown and mysterious murderer of the colored troops, there had been no fatality among them.

For some days the guards had been trebled by night and doubled by day.

Then they had begun once more to have but one man on duty, commencing the very night of the two murders.

The guard on the night round at eight o'clock found two posts occupied by col-

ored sentinels with only a dead man there.

Colonel Thorp had been at supper when the report was made to him, and he at once gave the order to have the guards trebled again by night.

It was done, and then he sat down to enjoy his cigar, and to wonder that no word had come to him of Surgeon Powell, Silent Sam, and the Man Killer.

The Surgeon Scout certainly had not yet tracked down the mysterious slayer of the negro soldiers, as the two deaths that night went to prove.

Had he met Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill as he had anticipated, thought Colonel Thorp.

The stage coach would soon arrive, he hoped, for it was due that night at dark, and perhaps Fred Fletcher would bring in some news of the Surgeon Scout.

The coach, which had its terminus station at Fort Benham, had a run of two hundred miles, which Fred Fletcher alone made, preferring to draw double pay for the work, and go clear through, as he was allowed forty hours to make it in, and there was but one round trip a week.

He was seldom late, and now, as the time passed, and the coach did not arrive, Colonel Thorp began to grow anxious.

He was just about to call the orderly and ask if its lamps were in sight across the plain when he heard voices outside.

Then the orderly came in, accompanied by an Indian.

It was Man Killer, and the colonel gave him a hearty welcome.

Whatever the Indian had passed through, in his rapid ride, he was perfectly composed, and said:

"Man Killer come back.

"Has talking papers for great white chief.

"The White Beaver, Great Medicine Man of the Palefaces send talking papers."

He had taken out of a hidden pocket the two letters, the one given the driver, Fred Fletcher, and later the one given him by Buffalo Bill and also written by Surgeon Powell.

Colonel Thorp read them both through without comment, for they told him that Surgeon Powell was pushing ahead on the trail of the Woman in Black and her road-agent comrades, and all that had happened, to the holding up of the coach.

The letters also made known the fact that Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill were with the Surgeon Scout, the mysterious kidnapping of the horses of the party, and all that followed, as well as the capture of Harold Carr and his escape with all their animals.

The Surgeon Scout also asked Colonel Thorp to kindly send out by the Indian a horse for each of them, and two pack animals, along with a few extra supplies.

Colonel Thorp congratulated the Indian upon his quick ride, and was glad to hear from him that the coach would be along in a couple of hours, and why it was behind time.

"You will need rest to-night, so you can start back in the morning," said Colonel Thorp.

But Man Killer asserted that he was not tired, needed no rest, and wished to get back with all haste to White Beaver and his companions.

He asked the colonel to let the horses be gotten at once, and also the supplies, and he would be ready to go within the hour.

This Colonel Thorp was only too anxious to have him do, if he was willing, for he did not like the idea of the party being dismounted in that wild country longer than was necessary.

But he offered to send a scout along with the Man Killer to help him with the horses.

This the Indian refused, and in a way that showed that he considered it a reflection upon his ability to go through alone with the horses.

The colonel saw how the Man Killer felt, and hastened to assure him that he

had only intended to relieve him in his hard task.

"Talking paper ask for more scouts?" questioned the Indian.

"No."

"White Beaver don't want more scout then," was the reply.

So the colonel sent the Indian off to get supper, ordered the horses and supplies, and in one hour he was ready for the start.

A letter was written to Surgeon Powell by Colonel Thorp, who gave it to the Indian, grasped his hand and saw him ride away, leading the half dozen fine horses selected for the party, and himself mounted upon a splendid animal.

An hour after his departure the coach lamps were seen dancing across the prairie, and when Fred Fletcher came in he reported having met the Indian and his horses going leisurely back on the trail, and then he gave Colonel Thorp a description of his hold up by the Woman in Black and her comrades.

A couple of hours after the arrival of the coach, there was a shot heard, a cry of alarm from one of the posts, followed by a call for the guard.

Then the news spread through the fort like wildfire that another negro soldier had been killed on his post, though with him had also been two white sentinels.

He had been shot through the heart, and the flash of the murderer's rifle had come from only a short distance away.

It was the third victim that night at Fort Benham.

CHAPTER LX.

TRACKING BUFFALO BILL.

Surgeon Powell returned from where he had left Buffalo Bill to the summit of the range, and made his way back down into the canyon.

He found Silent Sam not so well; his wound was inflamed, and he had some fever.

He did what he could for him, and made preparations for an early start the next morning to follow the trail of Buffalo Bill.

With Wild Bill he talked over matters fully, and stated that he expected one of them would be back within twenty-four hours, and he hoped to have made some discovery of importance.

If neither Buffalo Bill or himself did return within that time, he suggested that Wild Bill keep watch for the coming of the Man Killer with the horses, and instead of taking them down to the camp in the canyon, that they bring the outfit up to the range and push on after their trail, adding:

"I will leave good signs for you to follow, Wild Bill."

"I'll get there, doctor; but do you think Silent Sam is going to be ill from that wound?"

"I hope not, though it is possible that he might. We will get him into a camp nearer operations as soon as Man Killer returns," was the answer.

Turning in for the night, Surgeon Powell slept well and long, and upon rising early was glad to find that Silent Sam was no worse, if not better.

He again dressed his wound and gave Wild Bill instructions how to do it, and left medicines for him to give the trapper.

Then he started off with a good supply of food and ammunition for Buffalo Bill and himself.

He reached the summit of the range by sunrise, took a short rest, and went along the stage trail to where that of the road-agents had turned off.

It was just at the hour he had appointed when he walked into the little thicket where he had left Buffalo Bill.

To his surprise there was not only no sign of the Chief of Scouts, but no fire or other indication that he had been there all night.

What did it mean, he wondered.

At first he feared harm had befallen Buffalo Bill.

Then he remembered that he had al-

ways argued that Buffalo Bill was not doomed to die with his boots on, after all he had passed safely through.

It then flashed across his mind that the scout had struck some trail he would not give up to return and meet him, and the best thing he could do would be to follow him.

It was not a light load he had to carry, as may be imagined, but he shouldered it and set out on the trail of the road-agents, and which Buffalo Bill had gone upon.

He walked at a steady pace, and at last came to the stream.

Here he halted, but only to gather some driftwood, tie it together with a lariat, cut a sapling for a pole, and start anew.

He reached the other shore some distance below the ford, but with dry feet.

He dragged his raft ashore, unfastened the lasso, and left the driftwood for use again, if needed.

He soon came to the end of the trail, as far as seeing the tracks of the road-agents' horses was concerned.

But there was the note left in the stick by Buffalo Bill.

"I did the right thing to follow promptly," he said when he had read the short note.

He then pushed on once more, his keen eyes detecting the slight trace of the pointed stick dragged by Buffalo Bill, and the stones here and there turned over by the scout to mark his way.

He reached the other stream at the base of the range beyond the large valley he had crossed, and here he set to work to build another raft.

This done, he crossed the stream safe and dry, as in the other case, and then pushed on once more.

At length he came to a spot where he halted.

But for the fact that he was closely watching his every step he would have failed to observe a small mark that was a faintly traced arrow.

It pointed off the trail.

He went in the direction it pointed, and found himself in a thicket, right where the canyon narrowed and branched in two directions.

Here, too, he found a stick stuck in the ground and a small paper folded around it.

The note was written in cipher, but well understood by Surgeon Powell. It read as follows:

"I have made an important discovery.

"Went from here last night to reconnoitre, camped here until this morning and now start again.

"Remain in hiding here until I return, and lay low, for camp of road-agents is in canyon to the right."

There was no address or signature, but Surgeon Powell knew that it was for him, and that Buffalo Bill had written it.

CHAPTER LXI.

TRACKING THE SURGEON SCOUT.

Wild Bill felt the loneliness of his position in the little camp, with Silent Sam in distress on his hands, more than he would have been alone.

He took good care of the wounded trapper, however, gave him his medicines, killed some birds for him to eat, and at night tenderly dressed his wound.

He was glad to see that Silent Sam grew no worse.

His fever did not increase, and his wound appeared to be less inflamed.

But the old trapper had certainly had a severe blow, for he was more silent even than was his wont, spent most of the time lying down and appeared to be at times but semi-conscious.

As Wild Bill felt that it was growing time for the coming of the Indian, who might make better time than was anticipated, and with his coming the camp would be changed, he determined the afternoon of the third day in camp to

go up on the ridge, carrying the saddles along with him.

He made a trip well loaded down, hid the saddles, waited for some time and then returned to camp.

Wild Bill got supper, and leaving Silent Sam sleeping, took another load up to the ridge, though it was now night.

Taking up his position to command the trail, where they had gone down to their other camp, he smoked his pipe and waited with the resignation of an Indian.

The hours went by, midnight came, passed, and still he kept watch.

The Indian must be along soon, he felt certain.

At last he heard a sound that at once brought him to his feet.

There was the sound of hooffalls.

Soon, as the sound grew louder and louder, there came dimly into view a horse and rider.

Other horses followed, but with no riders.

"Ho, Chief!"

The horses halted, and the Indian asked, for it was the Man Killer:

"Is it the White Beaver?"

"No, Wild Bill."

Explanations followed, the horses were staked out on the slope, and the scout and the Indian walked along the ridge to the place which led down into the canyon camp.

Silent Sam was still sleeping, and seemed not to be disturbed, while the two carried more of the outfit up to the ridge.

At last breakfast was ready, and Wild Bill aroused Silent Sam, though with some effort, and once more tenderly cared for him.

The trapper seemed very quiet, ate little breakfast, but was able to walk up the steep trail, while the scout and the Indian carried the last of the traps.

Securing all these, in the early dawn the two went after the horses, and they were found as they had been left, and much rested, for the Man Killer had pushed them along well in his coming.

They were soon saddled, the packs put on, Silent Sam and the others mounted, and the start was made to follow in the trail of Buffalo Bill and Surgeon Powell.

The latter had, as he had promised, left "signs," and Wild Bill found no difficulty in following.

He found at the camp where Surgeon Powell had expected to join Buffalo Bill a note which told him that he had not joined him there, and so they pushed on once more.

Reaching the stream, the driftwood was discovered, and quickly made into a raft, for the Indian swam across and brought it back.

On this Silent Sam and the pack saddles crossed over, and the trail was again resumed.

The second stream was reached before sunset, and the raft, left by the Surgeon Scout, was brought into use.

Once more the saddle horses were led over by Wild Bill, Silent Sam, who was growing weak, and who seemed to be in a bad way, being sent over on the raft.

Again ready to mount, Silent Sam was found to be really too much fatigued to ride alone, so, as it was now nearly night, a good camping place was sought and found.

The trapper was first called for, and Wild Bill found that he was suffering greatly.

His wounded head was more inflamed, his fever higher, and he seemed barely more than conscious.

The blankets were spread for him, and refusing supper he dropped off to sleep, Wild Bill remarking:

"I guess the trapper is done for, Man Killer."

"Feel heap bad. Maybe die bimeby."

"I am pretty sure that he will die bimeby, pard," responded Wild Bill, dryly, and he added:

"Well, we have horses and extra sup-

plies, while we are much nearer our pards here than in the camp we left.

"We will see what the morrow has in store for us, and meet what comes as best we can," and the frontier philosopher turned in for rest, the Indian taking the first watch.

CHAPTER LXII.

BUFFALO BILL ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

"At last," Buffalo Bill had said, when he looked at the light glimmering ahead of him up the canyon.

He concluded to go ahead, and make a thorough reconnoissance of this canyon, and also of the camp which he now was sure he had come upon.

"It is a quiet place, the plain is trackless leading to it, and the road-agents have chosen wisely in having their retreat here.

"But I happened to have followed, and I believe the end is not far off."

So mused Buffalo Bill, as he moved ahead.

As he advanced, he saw that the light was much further off than he had supposed it to be.

Another thing was that if he stepped either to the right or left, he lost sight of the light.

His eyes were blinded by it to a slight degree, and he turned his back and began to look over the way he had come.

He felt that something was wrong.

With the light no longer in his eyes, he began to see clearly about him, although it was now night, and the high walls of the canyon shut him in with greater gloom.

As he looked he uttered an exclamation.

On his right was a precipice, not three feet from where he stood.

It looked far down into blackness and death.

A step or two in that direction and he would have gone to his doom.

He now looked on the other side.

There, too, was a precipice.

It looked down also to death.

The canyon there was not over a hundred yards wide, and in its centre was a ridge of rock, with the two yawning chasms, one on either side.

Only this narrow ridge in the centre, and it not five feet wide, scarcely so much in places, though wider here and there.

With all his nerve, Buffalo Bill felt the shock of his narrow escape.

He turned again.

There was the light.

"That is the beacon to guide the band by night to the camp.

"Others attempting to follow would be dashed to death.

"It looks to me that these chasms are very deep, and it would be a bad place to travel by day, if one's head was not level.

"I made a narrow escape, but as I have come this far, I will venture on."

With this he now moved forward, feeling every step, and keeping the beacon ahead constantly in sight.

A half a mile did he thus go over, with death on either side, when he came to a barrier.

It was a tree that had fallen across the ridge.

But along the tree to the right was plenty of space for him to pass.

He did so, and at the other end found bars put across.

Getting over them, he saw that he was in safety now, for the canyon spread out, was dotted with trees, a stream wound through it, and tumbled over the edge of a cliff into the precipice on one side of the ridge.

He felt, too, that the soil was soft; he was standing on a carpet of grass.

The light ahead was several hundred yards away, so he still advanced.

He realized that he was taking big chances, with no light at the other end to guide him back.

But he would go ahead, risk what he might.

His roll of blankets, provision bag, and

extra weight he left at the tree, and took his bearings well from the high cliffs upon either side.

Then he moved forward toward the light.

As he did so he saw objects moving about.

They were horses, over a score in number.

He knew now why the bars were put up.

Catching one of the horses without trouble, he used him as a foil.

He walked by the side of the animal until he got near to the camp.

There were a couple of rude cabins there, sheltered by a grove of pines, but the light he had seen he now discovered was a large lantern on a rock.

The cabins, he was sure, could not be seen from the ridge trail to the retreat.

Going nearer, he gained the pines, and he saw a party of four persons seated at a table at supper.

There was a campfire near, and a man was busy cooking.

Three of those at the table were men, the fourth was the Woman in Black.

A lantern swung from the limb of a tree over the table, and lighted up the faces of those seated there.

For one hour did Buffalo Bill watch them, and then, as he was preparing to go, he heard the sound of hoofs.

A horse was coming at a gallop across the level valley, as he had come.

A moment more, and a man rode up, dismounted, gave his horse to one of those at the table, who came forward to meet him, and advancing to where the others were, sat down.

The man at the fire at once began to serve his supper, and as the light of the lantern fell upon him, Buffalo Bill recognized Harold Carr, the escaped prisoner.

The man who had taken his horse drew off the saddle and bridle, and turned him loose.

Then he took the beacon lantern off the rock and joined the others.

The lantern had evidently been put there to guide him to the retreat.

Buffalo Bill was too far off to hear what was said, but he had found the Woman in Black, the escaped prisoner, Harold Carr, and their retreat.

There were, as far as he had discovered, six persons in the band, one being a woman.

"I'll go back and get help.

"I only need the rest of our party to rope in this layout," said Buffalo Bill.

But to get back was a difficulty which the scout overcame after a moment of thought.

He caught a horse to make him his guide.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS CAMPERS.

It was a clever thing in Buffalo Bill to make one of the outlaw's horses his guide.

He knew that where a horse had been he could go again, however dark and dangerous the way.

He made a bridle with his lariat, used the ends as reins, and led him through the bars upon the ridge.

Then he took up his traps left there, and, putting up the bars again, got behind the horse and drove him, as it were, along the perilous trail.

When he had safely passed over the ridge, with the guidance of the horse, Buffalo Bill determined to take the animal back again, not caring to make a mistake of having him missed in the morning by the outlaws.

Looking about him, he found, after a long search, two long sticks, and in going back used them for guides on each side, keeping them over the edges of the precipice.

He also watched his way most carefully, as the horse went along.

At the bars he let the horse into the valley, then, with his sticks, began to retrace his way.

It was slow work, but he made it in safety, and came to where he had left his traps.

Taking these up, he went back through the canyon, reached the little river, and went down it for a camping place.

He found a good one, ate a cold supper, and turned in.

As he lay down his eyes beheld the glimmer of a light.

At once he arose and began to reconnoitre.

It was the light of a campfire, he was sure.

He went on down the stream for some distance, and at last came upon a scene that surprised him.

Camping right on the river bank was a small party.

They had evidently just gone into camp, the building of the fire having attracted his attention. Seeing that he could get nearer by getting under the river bank, he did so, and soon gained a position within twenty feet of the campers.

What he saw fairly startled him.

What he overheard startled him the more.

About the campfire were five persons, and staked out not far distant was a group of horses.

There was a small tepee of Indian manufacture, a couple of pack saddles well filled, and altogether a good outfit for the campers.

But the campers.

There were two white men, a young man and one with iron gray hair, both fine specimens of manhood.

There was a large negro man and a negress.

The fifth of the group was the Woman in Black.

Her veil was raised now and her hat cast aside, and Buffalo Bill saw a bronzed, but really beautiful face, a slender, graceful, and wiry form.

The negro was cooking supper, the negress setting a table that had been taken from one of the pack saddles, and was in sections.

There were campstools, several hammocks swung in the trees, and altogether the scene was a comfortable one, while two large dogs, too busily watching the cooking of supper to know the scout was so near, were lying near the Woman in Black.

Buffalo Bill was glad to see that the wind blew from the dogs toward him.

What he heard was as follows:

"We made a mistake, Kate, in not uniting our force with Buffalo Bill and his party, when we found out who they were, for then there would have been no trouble in corralling Carr and his cut-throat gang."

"Yes, father; but we can surprise them in their retreat, and that is half the battle, and they do not greatly outnumber us," said the Woman in Black.

"Yes, we are near their retreat, for I am sure you have made no mistake, Kate, and we must attack them to-morrow night; but, as you say, father, we did make a mistake in not joining forces with Buffalo Bill and that officer we saw with him," said the young man.

"It is not too late to do a good deed."

Buffalo Bill uttered the words as he swung himself over the bank, and strode into the full glare of the firelight.

There were startled cries, two savage yelps from the dogs, and they bounded toward the scout.

But a stern command from the Woman in Black cowed them, and she cried:

"Father! Brother! it is Buffalo Bill!"

"At your service, lady," and the scout politely raised his sombrero.

"I am so glad to meet you again, sir, for we were just wishing for you."

"The last time you met you saved my life, and I ran away from you."

"But how did you find us?"

"I have been, as I supposed, upon your trail for a week, miss, but it seems I am mistaken, for there appears to be two of you," and Buffalo Bill laughed.

"I do not wonder that you have been deceived, Mr. Cody, for others have been; but let me present you to my father, Andrew Kennon, some years ago a captain in the army, but now a miner, and this is my brother, Wilber Kennon, also a miner."

The father and brother of the woman warmly shook hands with Buffalo Bill, after which she continued:

"And you must know our whole party, Mr. Cody, and explanations will follow later."

"This is my maid, Quickstep, and Toby is her husband, and devoted friends they are to us, as you will know."

"There are our four-footed friends, Sentinel and Guard, and they are worth their weight in silver."

Buffalo Bill shook hands with both Quickstep and Toby, patted Sentinel and Guard upon the head, and took the seat placed for him by Wilber Kennon, accepting the invitation to have supper with pleasure, for he had eaten but sparingly of his scant provisions that day.

CHAPTER LXIV.

HER DOUBLE.

As Kate Kennon had said to Buffalo Bill, explanations did follow.

It was after supper that Buffalo Bill heard the strange story, and it unfolded mystery, wrong, and crime to his ears.

He heard how Andrew Kennon had been a captain in the United States Army, but resigned because he had been financially ruined by a friend whom he had trusted with all of his business interests.

Stationed upon the frontier, from Texas to Colorado, both of Captain Kennon's children, his son Wilber and daughter Kate, had been born in a border fort, and reared among wild life until the youth was eighteen, the girl sixteen, when they were sent to New York to be educated.

Two years had been spent there when the crash came, Captain Kennon finding his fortune swept from him by his trusted friend, Harold Carr, having lost all in speculation.

Resigning from the army, Captain Kennon had gone to the mines, to try and win a fortune, and there his two children had joined him.

After a year of hard luck, they had struck it rich in an obscure camp, and all had gone there, their faithful black servants accompanying them.

But another misfortune had dogged them.

Harold Carr, Junior, the son of Captain Kennon's false friend, had fallen in love with Kate Kennon when she was East at school, but was refused.

He had threatened her that she should marry him alone, and soon after she had gone to join her father in the West he and his father and brother had to fly for their safety, having all been engaged in a fraudulent transaction.

Reaching the West, they went from bad to worse, and turned road-agents.

They allied themselves to Indians and evil characters, and one day a raid was made upon Captain Kennon's frontier home, in his absence, and Kate was kidnapped and carried to the outlaw retreat, to make her father pay largely of his new-found gold for her release, or force her into a marriage with her hated lover.

But, through the aid of one of the outlaws, whom the Kennons had once befriended, she escaped and returned to her home, while in the pursuit that followed Andrew Carr, Senior, had been killed by Captain Kennon, who thus avenged in part the wrong done him by his false friend.

To get revenge on the Kennons, Harold Carr, Jr., had dressed his younger brother up, as Kate was wont to dress, in a black riding habit, and the two, with their allies, going upon lawless trails, it became the belief that the miner, his daughter, and son were acting as road-agents.

As these rumors gained a wider circulation, Captain Kennon at length made up his mind to go on the hunt for his foes.

He did so, to learn that they were leaving the upper country to go back to their old retreat in the country adjacent to Fort Benham.

He began to trail them, and one day, while in camp, beheld from a cliff two horsemen coming, and mistaking them for Harold Carr and one of his men, he and his son lay in ambush for them.

The discovery that they were not those they sought, but Buffalo Bill and a companion, caused them to take to flight, and Kate had come to their rescue, she having meanwhile captured the Indian, Man Killer, in the canyon, as has been seen, for she could ride splendidly, throw a lasso with wondrous skill, was a dead shot, and as strong as a man.

Not caring to be followed by Buffalo Bill and those with him, and thus thrown off the trail of Harold Carr, they had determined to cover up their tracks all in their power.

It was while reconnoitering the scouts' camp alone that Kate Kennon had been seen and pursued by Surgeon Powell, to whom, when she saw that his horse had gone down, she had given the iron gray she rode, and written the note of warning.

Again, when mounted upon her black, and returning to see if the scouts were still following, she had, in crossing the river, been met by Harold Carr himself, and but for Buffalo Bill would have been captured.

She had believed that Buffalo Bill had killed Harold Carr, but they determined to still track down the band, and the youth who was playing the part of her double, and so she had been the guide to the outlaw's retreat, where she had once been their prisoner.

To let the outlaws not suspect their intention, they had made a wide circuit, and were then in camp to await until the next night, and move on their retreat.

And that very day, from a distant range, they had seen Harold Carr come out of the canyon, ride across the plain, and toward night saw him returning, but to capture him then they found would be impossible.

"He had gone back, doubtless, after reaching his camp with our horses which he had stolen, to see if we were still on his trail, or had gone back.

"As he did not find us in the camp, he must think we had returned to the fort," said Buffalo Bill.

"And with your aid, Mr. Cody, we can readily capture their camp," said Captain Kennon.

"We must make no mistake, sir, and a little longer delay will make sure of it.

"I have back on the trail, Surgeon Powell, who leads our expedition; Wild Bill, my comrade in scouting, and two others from Fort Benham, though one is away now, having gone to the fort after a fresh mount for us, and the other, I fear, is badly wounded, for Harold Carr dealt him a severe blow in escaping, but with the Surgeon, my pard, and the Indian, Man Killer, even without Silent Sam we can make a complete success of our attack, for they will be along, I feel certain, very soon."

"You spoke of an Indian whom you called Man Killer, and a wounded man by the name of Silent Sam?" said Captain Kennon.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know those two men, Mr. Cody?"

"Only as frequenters of the fort and the allies of Surgeon Powell, sir."

"Well, let me tell you what I know of them, having just discovered all that they are before I left my camp, and I intended notifying the commandant at the fort.

"The Indian is part Pawnee, part Sioux, and has white blood in his veins, while he has lived with half a dozen tribes and the whites as well.

"He is desperate, fearless, and merciless.

"The white man, Silent Sam, is his devoted pard, though they do not appear to be such, always pretending to be alone.

"Silent Sam came West long years ago, a good man, and made his home, leaving his family with him.

"The Indian, Man Killer, his squaw, and child made their home with them.

"One night a band of Indians, who had massacred a party of troops, taken their uniforms, weapons, and equipments, blacked their faces with war paint and attacked Silent Sam's home and the Man Killer's cabin, the two men being absent.

"The wife and squaw and the children were killed, scalped, and the houses robbed and burned.

"The squaw lived long enough to greet Silent Sam and Man Killer on their return, and told them that negro cavalry had done the appalling deed.

"From that day Silent Sam and the Indian became avengers, and have killed the negro soldiers whenever they could do so, and I have learned that they even pretended to be friends to all at the fort to carry out their murderous plans.

"So you see, Mr. Cody, you have two very dangerous men with you, while they are also allies of Harold Carr's outlaw band, report the movements of valuable freight by the coaches, and aid them in many ways.

"I feel sorry for them, but they will take no man's word against that of the dying squaw, that black cavalry raided their home, and more, it was Silent Sam who aided my daughter to escape from Harold Carr, for he is not bad at heart, only a monomaniac on the subject of killing the black cavalry."

CHAPTER LXV.

THE TRAIL'S END.

Buffalo Bill was never more surprised in his life than when he heard the strange story of wrong and treachery in which Silent Sam and Man Killer were connected.

He could not doubt it, and he at once made known all that Surgeon Powell had told him about the Indian and the trapper.

He also told how they had been bound, gagged, and surprised on post, and Captain Kennon said:

"All their own work against themselves, for they are adepts at trickery.

"That you and the others were drugged was their work, though Harold Carr doubtless furnished the drug put in your coffee and pipes.

"They took your horses back on the trails, gave you warnings, and did all they could to force you to return, because they did not wish to kill you.

"As for the fact of Surgeon Powell knowing Harold Carr, I think I can explain that by saying that once they were friends, and Carr visited Powell at the fort for months, then robbed him and fled.

"Then Carr was wont to lie in wait for Surgeon Powell to kill him, and very nearly was successful; but Surgeon Powell, I have been told, was so hurt by the act of his false friend that he never spoke to any one.

"Now, I think we understand each other, and my advice is to first get your grip on Silent Sam and the Indian, and then we will have no trouble in capturing Harold Carr, his brother Burt, who is impersonating my daughter, and his companions in crime."

"It is the right plan to pursue, sir, and we may as well wait here, for, knowing Surgeon Powell and Wild Bill as I do, I am sure that they will follow me very quickly, as soon as the Indian returns with horses, for that he will be sure to do, even if he and Silent Sam

took some other plan to thwart us in pursuing this trail."

Soon after, as it was now growing late, they all retired to rest, Kate Kennon and Quickstep retiring to the Indian tepee, while Captain Kennon, Wilber, and the negro, Toby, turned in in their hammocks, Buffalo Bill taking his blankets.

The two dogs were put on guard, and good ones they were.

It was the next night when Surgeon Powell was overtaken by Wild Bill, the Indian, Silent Sam, and went into camp together, that Buffalo Bill appeared before them like an apparition, for he had been on the watch for their coming, having just met the Surgeon Scout, and arranged to join him later, when the others had come up.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CONCLUSION.

It was a surprise to Man Killer when he suddenly found himself in the power of the three scouts, and was made a prisoner; but he accepted his fate in silence, while Silent Sam, now rapidly passing from life to death, rallied for a few moments, and confirmed the whole story told by Captain Kennon of his own and the Indian's revenge upon the black troops.

And more, he said that he felt sure that Man Killer had not gone to the fort without killing others.

This the Indian proudly admitted was the truth, as he had left his horse, gone ahead, and killed two men, then ridden on to the fort, and when leaving with the horses had gone back on foot and shot another black sentinel.

That night Silent Sam died and was buried, while Captain Kennon and his party, uniting camps, Kate and Quickstep, with the two dogs, being left to guard the bound Indian, while the scouts and their newly found allies took up their trail for the outlaw retreat.

Buffalo Bill, guided by his two sticks, led the way along the narrow ridge, the others following, and on foot they crept up to the two cabins and surrounded them. When dawn arrived, and Harold Carr and his men appeared, a demand was made by Surgeon Powell for their surrender, and at once a quick, sharp fight was precipitated.

Harold Carr dropped dead under the fire of Surgeon Powell, his brother, Burt, still wearing his feminine disguise, was killed by Wilber Kennon, and Buffalo Bill and the others wiped out the rest of the band, not one surviving.

A few slight wounds were received by the attacking party, but that was all, and what they had accomplished was much.

The booty was packed upon the horses found in the canyon, the cabins were set on fire, and the whole party returned to their camp, where it was found that the Man Killer had ended his own life by taking some of the drug he had secreted about him.

By the side of Silent Sam he was buried, and the next day the whole party took the trail for Fort Benham, where the story was told, and Colonel Thorp was glad to welcome Captain Kennon, Kate, and Wilber as guests.

Furthermore, he urged that Kate should remain at the fort, while the father and brother returned to their mine, and right there in Fort Benham Kate Kennon met her fate, as she later became the wife of Colonel Thorp's aide, Lieutenant Tylor.

Back to their posts of duty went Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill, to win new laurels as scouts, while Surgeon Frank Powell soon after resigned from the army, and now dwells in La Crosse, Wisconsin, of which city he has been several times the mayor.

Wild Bill lies buried near Deadwood, and Buffalo Bill to-day is known the world over as the King of Bordermen.

THE END.

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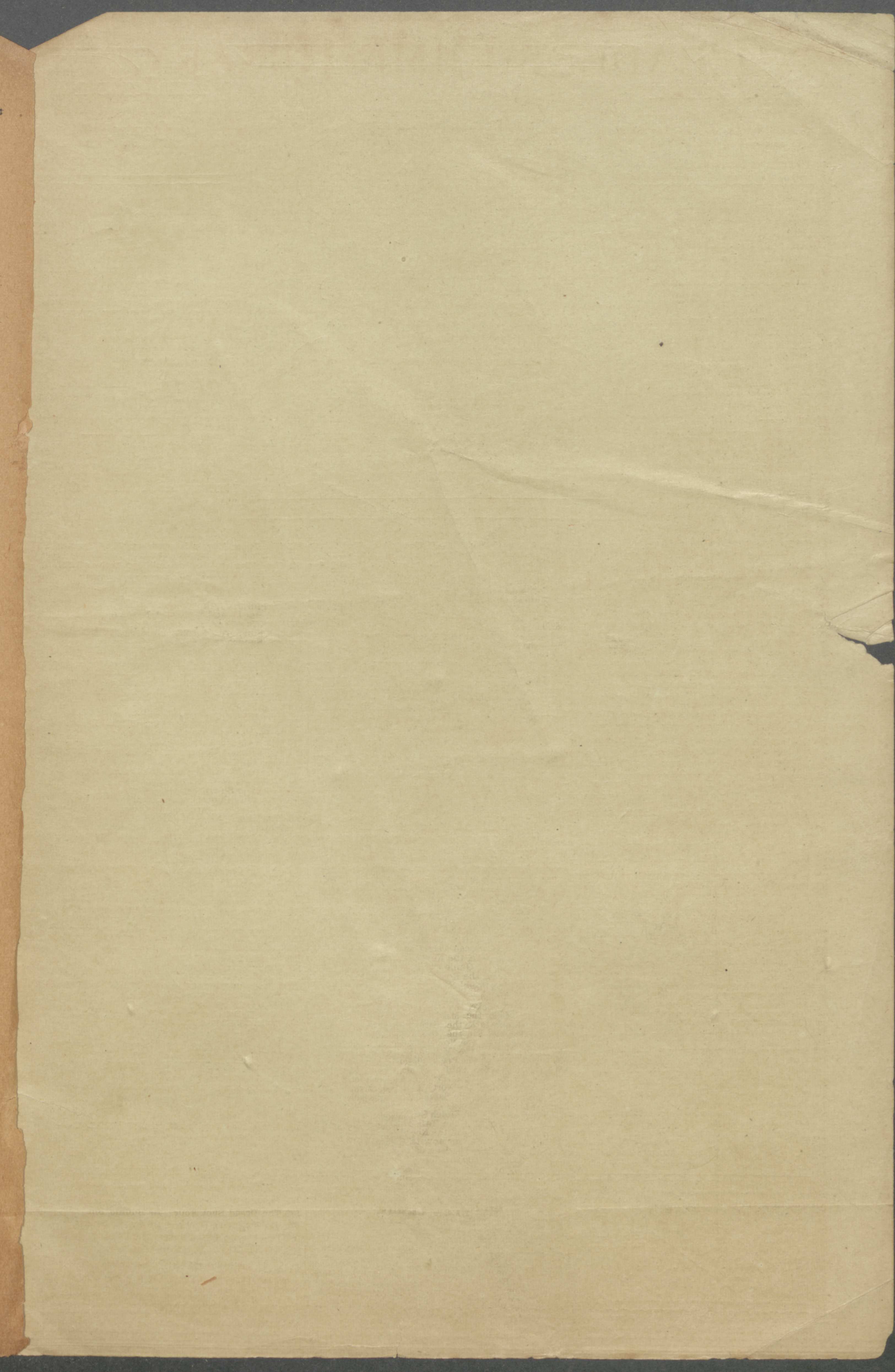
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